



*Lays  
of  
The  
Dragon-  
Slayer*

*Maxwell  
Gray*

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of the  
Dragon  
Slayer*



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Tuttielt, Mary Glead  
Lays  
of the  
Dragon  
Slayer

*By*

MAXWELL

GRAY, pseud.

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## PREFACE

**T**HOUGH more than ten years—half ten years again—have passed since these Lays were written, they seem to the writer now, as then, in spite of defects and crudities, touched with the subtle magic that distinguishes poetry, however faulty, from verse, however perfect.

It seemed a sin, that increased with years, to leave them to yellow unseen in their dark drawer; but not until now was leisure found to bring them to light. After all, to publish poetry is not an indictable offence, nor does the writer echo the pious aspiration of Walt Whitman—

“Let him who is without my poems be assassinated!”

## PREFACE

The last of the seven lays, "The Niblung Woe," still remains in that rare library in the castle Hawthorne built out of sunset clouds, and pillared with solid gold of morning sunbeams, alongside of the unwritten cantos of the *Fairy Queen*, the untold *Canterbury Tales*, the end of *Christabel*, and the remainder of Keats' *Hyperion*. Thence it may one day descend to shelves of terrestrial growth, should this volume meet with success.

*Carisbrooke, I. W., 1894.*

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## NOTE

THE *Nibelungen Lied* is known to the writer only by Carlyle's unpleasant and patronizing essay, and the synopsis in Vilmar's *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*. The *Edda* was first seen after some of these Lays were completed.

The writer has not seen either Mr. William Morris's treatment of the Niblung myths, or Wagner's music-dramas on the same.

Two of the Preludes—those marked with an asterisk—appeared in "*Westminster Chimes and Other Poems*" (Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.), 1889.



LAY THE FIRST

CHRIEMHILD'S DREAM





*PRELUDE*

**The Rhine**

**T**HIS is the Rhine, the haunted Rhine!  
The chastened glow of evening falls  
On emerald waves and craggy walls,  
On the golden green of the bending vine,  
On the storied Rhine.

Athwart the cliffs the gold lights slide ;  
They tremble along the shadowed stream,  
They fire with swiftly dying gleam  
The little boats that slowly glide  
On the quiet tide.

Sweet it were to drift for ever  
Between the broad Rhine's towered walls,  
Above his jewelled water-halls,  
Above strange things that glance and quiver  
Beneath the river.

Was the bark wrought by mortal hand?  
It is unsubstantial as a gleam,  
And we, the shapes of a formless dream,  
Float shadowy, like a spirit band  
From faëry land.

What is the song, the wondrous song,  
That winds about the winding river,  
Winding about and changing ever,  
Now sad with deep and deadly wrong,  
Now sweet and strong?

Is it the fairy's charmèd lay,  
That takes the fisher, home returning,  
And fills him with a nameless yearning  
Till he follows entranced away, away  
From the light of day?

Is it a voice from the dim, dark Eld,  
That thrills the waters laid to sleep,  
That echoes along the castled steep,  
How valiant men those towers held,  
In the dim, dark Eld?

Is it the cry of patriot blood,  
That hallows the wave from age to age  
Is it the shriek of robber rage,  
That ever has stained the holy flood  
With alien blood?

The voice of legend old and dim,  
Of fairy revel and fairy feast?  
The cry of the fierce and tortured priest,  
Or warrior's shout or monk's sweet hymn,  
By the river's brim?

Or the tale of the dragon-guarded gold,  
A hero's dower to a wrongèd bride,  
Wrung of heart and crushed in pride,  
When into the sunless wave they rolled  
The fateful gold?

Are the weird mist-children dwelling there?  
Do they guard beneath the emerald floor  
The blood-stained treasure's mystic store,  
Do they wait and watch with weapons bare  
In the magic glare?

The topmost cliffs are tipped with gold,  
The climbing forest's winding maze  
Is wrapped in amethystine haze,  
Crimson lights are sunk and rolled  
In the waters cold.

A towered city is shining fair  
In the glowing eve, and a gold-green sky  
Looks down on the vineyards terraced high,  
The boat glides on like a passing care,  
In the perfumed air.

I trow a maiden is gazing down  
    In the balmy eve from her crag-built bower ;  
    And a hid knight sings at the trysted hour ;  
He clings to the rocks that perilous frown  
    On the water brown.

The river spirit is floating dim  
    In the shadowy folds of darkening cliffs,  
    His trailed robe draws the passing skiffs,  
He sings, as he brushes the water's brim,  
    His mystical hymn.

Beware of the touch of his mantle's hem !  
    If it but sweep the vessel's rim,  
    We are caught in the fold of his raiment dim,  
We are dazed by the light of the pale green gem  
    In his diadem.

Now the last glance of passing day  
    Reddens a turret, far and fair ;  
    Dimly seen on the rocky stair,  
A peasant is climbing his homeward way  
    In the shadows gray.

He hears the music, faint and strange,  
    He crosses himself for fear, I ween,  
    Looks up at the crags that over him lean ;  
Higher and higher they seem to range  
    As the shadows change.

Our bark was never of mortal mould—  
Over the water's silent tide,  
Swift and sure as thought, we glide  
Into the shades that softly fold  
The waters cold.

Who with us in the viewless bark  
Will float and dream on the storied Rhine?  
Who will look for the magic shine  
Of treasure deep in the hidden ark  
Of the waters dark?

*LAY THE FIRST***Chriembild's Dream**

## I.

**D**REAMS hold the cradled babe in peace  
    profound,  
    Blend with the perfume of joy's earliest blooms ;  
This mortal life is folded and enwound  
    By deeper, stronger life, whence awful glooms,  
    The shades and semblances of mighty dooms,  
Or the dim reflex of majestic deeds  
    From that vague world whose shape so darkly  
    looms  
Upon us, cross our sleep ; and he who heeds  
With careful thought these shades, life's veiled  
    future reads.

## II.

For while the infant plays the sisters spin ;  
    He sports unthinking in the shining sun,  
And the grim Norns the fated web begin ;  
    His spirit blooms, his passions, one by one,  
    Enkindle, and the mesh is ever spun  
Around him. So he springs to manhood's grace :  
    This way or that he proudly deems to run  
The awful lists arrayed for life's stern race,  
Nor recks upon his brow the dread Norns' secret  
    trace.

## III.

But when in silence of the shadowed night  
He lies in youth's deep slumber softly bound,  
Like levin on his spirit's inner sight  
Strange scenes burst, and he looks as one astound,  
As some wise seër, held in magic swound,  
Beholds the lifting of the awful veil,  
Hears the strong accents of a speech profound ;  
Nor knows, but dimly bodes, some coming bale,  
And wakes with bristling hair and features wild  
and pale.

## IV.

He wakes ; nor heeds he in the morning's joy  
The things that froze his blood in midnight still,  
Nor knows the Future on the dreaming boy  
Hath gazed, or that the shade of coming ill  
Or good hath wrought this deep and deadly chill ;  
Nor of the dream that wraps the troubled dream  
We call our life, nor of the bounds to will  
The Norns must set us, does the glad youth deem :  
There are who know, they know fate's source and  
life's high stream.—

## V.

O thou, who broodest on the chaos dread  
Of cosmic life ; who through their tangled maze  
The homeless stars hast steered, and safely led  
This air-poised bark through world-storms and  
the blaze

Of dying planets ; sleep her soft wing lays  
 Not on thee, O Unweari'd, nor may dream  
 Thee touch ; all things show clear beneath the rays  
 Of thy dread glance ; Eternal, thee we deem  
 Of life, fate, power, and love the source and end  
 supreme ;

## VI.

And thou our rough-hewn, rudely-fashioned ends  
 Dost exquisitely shape with perfect skill,  
 Thou the fierce passion that so lavish spends  
 Its strength, all gently swayst beneath thy will ;  
 Even evil things and vile at last fulfil  
 Unwitting thy behest, and thou dost wring  
 From darkness light, and ordered calm distil  
 From th' everlasting storm, and quiet bring  
 From fury, thou above all tumult reignest king!—

## VII.

The boy wakes ; but a shadow clouds his path,  
 Erewhile so sunny, and a memory  
 Of awfulness, as of a high god's wrath  
 Or high god's lofty love that gloriously  
 Enfolds some mortal in divinity,  
 Until the hour of glory or of gloom  
 Shall strike, and he behind the veil shall see  
 That, shadowless, which erst did vaguely loom ;  
 Thus lives he, all unvexed by thought of coming  
 doom.



## VIII.

So with Chriemhild it fared, Chriemhild, the child  
Of Uta, sprung from the Burgundian line  
Of princes, they who ruled with sceptre mild  
At Worms, the ancient city by the Rhine.  
Uta had seen, before his strength's decline,  
Her king fall pallid in the clutch of death ;  
Then strove she, lest in grief her soul should pine,  
And gave herself to train, with loyal faith,  
The girl and three fair boys who breathed her lost  
king's breath.

## IX.

Now, on the threshold of life's flowery May,  
The maiden paused in dawning loveliness,  
Unvexed by any shadow, night or day ;  
And, as life in the cell, before the impress  
Of pollened anther in the light caress  
The dainty flower-cup's honeyed beauty hides,  
Lies unawakened, so to bane or bless  
Lay unknown germs in her ; as ocean tides  
Unknowing seek the moon, she to her life's goal  
glides.

## X.

The day was done ; long shadows stilly fell  
Upon the broad breast of the mighty Rhine,  
The forest slept as in a low-breathed spell,  
The peasant left the pruning of his vine,

More redly glowed the ruddy stems of pine,  
The sun's last glories stained the towers tall  
And hoary ramparts, as with heavenly wine,  
From woodlands far the wood-dove's plaintive  
call  
Blent with the varied song of myriad minstrels  
small.

## XI.

Upon the bastioned wall the princely maid  
Moved silent in the evening's chastened light,  
No more she led the dance, no more she played  
With noble damsels, who, in flower-wreaths dight,  
Made merry sport from May-day morn till night.  
Nor would she taste the scented, spiced May-wine,  
But gazed afar, as though her spirit's sight  
Saw what on mortal eye-ball may not shine :  
So in her castle fared the princess by the Rhine.

## XII.

This Uta saw, and knew the maiden vexed  
By shadows ; for the queen was skilled in lore,  
Not earthly ; mighty warriors ; perplexed  
In dream or counsel, laid their thoughts before  
That woman sage, and she, to whom the door  
Of hidden things had opened, gazed with eye  
Far-visions, and the veils from mystery tore :  
Thus heroes honoured her with reverence high  
As one who dwelt above our frail mortality.

## XIII.

Night fell apace ; the May-day mirth was done,  
The silent world in silvery sheen lay dressed,  
Deep slumber held the earth from sun to sun ;  
But Chriemhild, oft with mystic dream oppressed,  
Started with parching lip and throbbing breast,  
And ere the dawning streamed in liquid gold  
Through the straitcasement, she from broken rest  
Arose and saw the dewy day unfold ;  
And, later, to the queen her visions dim she told.

## XIV.

“Methought,” she said, “and twice I dreamed the  
same,  
Abroad in woods I fared in bloomy May,  
And heard small birds sing, when a falcon came,  
Of noble plume, and in the flowery way  
He stood, and me with looks did mutely pray.  
Then I, for that I greatly feared to tread  
That narrow path, lest I the hawk should slay,  
My scarf waved, deeming that he would have fled,  
But to my wrist he flew and perched, devoid of  
dread.

## XV.

“At this I greatly loved the gallant fowl,  
And took him home, and from my own hand fed.  
Jesses I broidered and a silken cowl,  
And set a perch for him beside my bed,

And him I found in hawk's art nobly bred ;  
Then nowhere joyed the bird save on my wrist,  
But whoso chid me pecked he that he bled,  
And oftentimes the gentle bird I kissed,  
Nor would he meat or drink if I his feeding missed.

## XVI.

"All this I dreamed ; but more remains behind,  
So dim, so wondrous, as no speech may tell ;  
Meseemed one day my falcon in the wind  
Was hovering, and I watched in joy, so well  
The hawk poised ; when two eagles fierce and fell  
I saw above my gentle tercelet soar ;  
I cried ; but as he flew upon the swell  
Of wind to me, the eagles swooped and bore  
My bird to earth, and him with crooked beaks  
fiercely tore.

## XVII.

"They tore my gallant hawk before my eyes,  
Nor could I hinder them that they him ate,  
And then with bloody beaks I saw them rise  
On kingly plumes ; and deep and deadly hate  
Burnt in me when those fierce birds soared elate,  
While I was left to weep my falcon slain.  
And them long while in ambush did I wait  
With archers, till I slew those birds ; and stain  
Of blood fell on me ; then I waked in dread and pain."

## XVIII.

Thus, with wide eyes and quivering nostril fine,  
The princess spake, yet all to tell forebore.  
And Uta, "Well may I that dream divine  
And glad am I to rede thee of my lore ;  
The gallant falcon that the eagles tore  
Is some great hero, who thy love shall gain  
And, in such bliss as mortal not before  
Hath known, shalt thou with him the golden chain  
Of love wear ; but at last thy hero shall be slain.

## XIX.

"For all beneath the moon must have an end ;  
Yea, this wide frame of earth and stars and sun  
Shall like a shadow pass. But God thee lend  
His mercy, that thy husband be not done  
To death in youth!" Then Chriemhild stood as one  
Astonished, and her tresses' wavy gold  
Shone in the vaulted chamber's twilight dim ;  
And the queen marvelled at the graceful mould  
Of her whose burgeoned bloom but promised to  
unfold.

## XX.

And there, as Chriemhild stood, the window pane,  
With deeds of ancient warriors blazoned fair,  
Let the May sunshine fall in rosy stain  
Upon her clasped white hands and shining hair.

Then turned she shuddering from the crimson glare  
 And moved towards the arras ; then again  
 Returned, and stood before the carven chair  
 Of Uta—then she spoke, with light disdain  
 Thrilling her voice that marked her soul of noble strain.

## XXI.

“And speakest thou of hero's love to me?  
 Nay, mother, never shall Chriemhild resign  
 Her maiden freedom, and the dignity  
 Of self-reliant joy to waste and pine  
 For man's love ; never hero shall be mine,  
 Though moulded as a god, perfection's star,  
 Though passing all the lordly lofty line  
 Of our divine forefathers ; for great war  
 With loving comes, and woe and death love's  
 music mar.”

## XXII.

Then Uta, wise with years, looked down and smiled,  
 As those who know. “Be not too sure,” she said ;  
 “If thou wilt drink of joy's full cup, fair child,  
 Man's love alone can fill it. Thou shalt wed  
 A mighty hero ; thus shalt thou be fed  
 With bliss. Thou knowest not the strength and stay  
 Of a good, great man's love ; Heaven's mercy shed  
 This blessing on our frail and suffering clay ;  
 Thy weakness know'st thou not, or life's thorn-  
 tangled way.”

## XXIII.

Full softly sighed the widowed queen and wan,  
Musing her own love's early darkened beam :  
" Fair daughter, ever since the world began,  
This is the minstrel's dearest, sweetest theme,  
This love which shadows forth, as some clear  
stream

A tower, Christ's loftier love to his fair bride ;  
But of its sweetness only those may deem  
Who once the mighty spell have fitly tried,  
And who once tastes of love all solace scorns beside.

## XXIV.

" Why are we soft and fragile, prone to fears,  
Why pine our spirits frail for love and care,  
How in the deathful dance of levelled spears,  
When the hoarse raven's banquet taints the air,  
How in the single sword-fight should we fare,  
How, in the dark, deep forest's tangled maze,  
The lean wolf's spring, or fierce boar's fury dare?  
In counsel, love, and solace lies our praise,  
And much we need man's care and strength through  
life's rough ways."

## XXV.

Then a swift lightning lit the azure mild  
Of Chriemhild's eyes, and quickly she replied,  
" Methinks the spirit of my father's child  
Might meet the surge of battle's roaring tide,

Or face the grim beast in the forest wide ;  
 But let that pass. A maiden's dignity  
 In deep seclusion dwells. And never bride  
 Of hero or of king shall Chriemhild be ;  
 Youth's primal joy would I keep pure and sorrow-  
 free.

## XXVI.

“ Fair mother, never yet was wife or maid  
 Her soul that yold to sweet, seductive spell  
 Of love, but she with anguish trebly paid  
 The brief, bright bliss that to her portion fell.  
 Oft have I heard old wives at twilight tell  
 Of gentle maiden loved and left forlorn,  
 And minstrels sweetest sing when most they dwell  
 On bleeding hearts pierced through by love's sharp  
 thorn ;  
 Thus, in the lighted hall, they sing how lovers  
 mourn.”

## SONG.

“ Oh ! why so blythe, sweet ladye,  
 When the white snow folds the lea,  
 Where the long, black night lies brooding,  
 And the blast howls angrily ? ”

“ Oh ! how should I be sighing,  
 When my true knight rides to me  
 Through the bitter blast's fierce howling,  
 Where the white snow folds the lea ? ”



“Ah ! why so sad, sweet ladye,  
When the May is beaming bright  
And the merry May-dance whirling  
And the May-meads lapped in light ?”

“Ah ! how should I be laughing,  
When my love lies cold and white,  
No might in the hero's sword-arm,  
In his starry eyes no light ?”

## XXVII. .

“Hark to my brother in the court below,  
While merry birds are singing sweet of May,  
He sings of love, and love repaid by woe ;  
God guard the lad from love for many a day !  
Sweet mother, I with thee will ever stay,  
With thee and my young brothers will I dwell ;  
So shall my life untroubled have its way,  
Like some full-flowing stream majestic swell ;  
Or in yon abbey gray find me a quiet cell.

## XXVIII.

“There will I read old tales, by dead men told,  
And wear away long nights in musings high ;  
For heaven to maiden vigils doth unfold  
The secrets oft of our humanity :  
There on the abbey terraces, that lie  
Above the kingly river's emerald tide,  
The virtue hid of root and herb will I  
Discover, and sick folk from far and wide  
Will heal ; and many an art and joy make known  
beside.

## XXIX.

"But liever in this ancient hall of kings  
     With thee and with my brethren I would be ;  
 Then oft some holy priest of lofty things  
     Might reason ; then sick, poor folk I might see  
     And solace ; and with maidens, sorrow-free,  
 Abroad in spring through greenwood alleys fare  
     With hawk and hound, or in a boat with thee  
 Adown the river float in summer air,  
 And tend sweet flowers and birds and bees, and  
     have no care.

## XXX.

"And, when grim winter with his tempests keen  
     And icy fangs begins to rudely chide,  
 With dance and minstrelsy"—But here the queen  
     Checked the fair princess in her joyous tide  
     Of day-dream, and full tenderly replied,  
 "And wilt thou have thy heart untouched by care?  
     Poor maiden ! Gold in flame is purified,  
 High God through sorrow makes man's spirit fair,  
 And thou of woe's fierce flame must have thy fated  
     share.

## XXXI.

"Yea, thou must sorrow and thou must rejoice  
     Beyond the common ; for thy heart beats strong  
 Beyond the common ; and to man the choice  
     Is not. Yet in thine anguish let no wrong

Thee conquer ; not as slaves who bear the thong  
And scourge, bear thou the loving wrath of heaven ;  
Who nobly sorrows will not sorrow long.  
God grant man's treachery be never given  
As poison in thy cup, nor bonds of blood be riven !'

## XXXII.

Here Uta crossed herself and turned in haste  
And spoke more cheerily. " But not with woe  
Would I thee sadden ; deep joy shalt thou taste,  
Yea, with love's bliss thy cup shall overflow.  
Oh ! bitter is her lot who walks below  
On this bleak earth alone ; what shield hath she  
From rudest blasts of scorn ? Well doth she know  
The hard, cold, pitiless world's scant charity,  
Knows well that for the weak there is no liberty.

## XXXIII.

" Yea, like a fair rose in a dungeon's night,  
Her beauty wastes, her sweetness is not known ;  
Well to a cloister may she take her flight,  
And hide in mighty arms of loveless stone.  
Dreary it is to sit at night alone  
And muse by crackling pine-logs, or to gaze  
Through lattice bars upon the blue void strown  
With holy watchfires ; drear to hear the lays  
Of mated birds, and walk green woods and flowery  
ways.

## XXXIV.

“ Dreary it is to feel high powers waste  
In dark oblivion, like brave fruits that rot  
Untasted ; for, if we not by men are braced  
And strengthened, very darksome were their lot  
Without us ; who should curb the rash and hot  
Intemperance of their blood, who soothe their pain,  
Who plant for them a green and gracious spot  
In life's dry desert, who with silken chain  
Of purer, gentler thought their world-worn spirits  
rein ?

## XXXV.

“ For when high God eternal would create  
The crown of all his creatures, not alone  
One made he them, but twain, each with his mate,  
Before divine breath in our clay was blown ;  
Of other each is part, as bone of bone.  
And know, fair child, before the babe's first cry  
The flower of woman's soul is still unknown,  
Till she gives life she lives not quite, though high  
Her soul's aim ; for her best locked in her heart  
must lie.

## XXXVI.

“ Wilt never hear the voices silvery sweet  
Of little clinging children cry to thee ?  
Like some half builded temple, incomplete,  
Unconsecrate by mysteries high, wilt be ?

Or rather, like some fair and fruitful tree  
Wide-branching, yield refreshing food and shade,  
That living creatures bless thy charity,  
That in thy boughs full-brooded nests are made,  
And at thy roots young lambs in noontide heats  
are laid?"

## XXXVII.

Now, Chriemhild by a pillar stood inclined  
Before the queen, and at her knee a hound  
Crouched fawning; him she stroked with absent  
mind,  
And ever in her ear the low, sweet sound,  
Like music touched by harper's skilful hand,  
Of singing from the court an echo found,  
To Uta's voice. And deep in musings bound  
She paused, as she would seek to understand  
Themes that were tangled fast in mystery's shadowy  
band.

## XXXVIII.

Deep-hearted Uta watched the dreamy haze  
Shadow the summer sunlight of her eyes,  
And deemed, and rightly deemed, that on her gaze  
Life opened in new forms that did surprise  
And charm and terrify; as one that tries  
A never-mounted steed, so, in her mind,  
The princess visioned yet unvisioned ties,  
And felt strange joys about her heart-strings wind,  
Then moved, as she some spell of magic would  
unbind.

## XXXIX.

She moved, upon her lips a swift smile fled,  
 The shadows left her sweet eyes, dewy blue,  
 A little loftier held her gold-bound head,  
 And turned, like bird impatient of his mew ;  
 " Fair Mother, wise are all thy words and true ;  
 But every creature doeth like his kind ;  
 Stags roam by day, but wolves when falls the dew  
 From starry skies ; I would be unconfined  
 By love-bands, and alone and strong down life's  
 vale wind.

## XL.

" For I am not, as many a gentle maid  
 I know, slight-built, a soft and fragile thing ;  
 Freedom I love ; I am not soon afraid ;  
 Then why should I about a hero cling,  
 As others use ? For bards of old time sing  
 Of might not earthly, given to maidenhood,  
 That on the marriage morn takes instant wing ;  
 Old sagas tell of choosers of the dead,  
 Strong maids, and Valas wise, who in the future  
 read :

## XLI.

" And how are they beyond all women blest,  
 Those virgins pure who live in convent cell !  
 Hath ever wedded wife such joys confessed  
 As they of vision high and vigil tell ?

And why should maidens lone and useless dwell?  
Who better may the wounded warrior tend,  
Or gather orphans in the gentle spell  
Of charity, who long night-watches spend  
So well in searchings deep of things that cannot  
end?

## XLII.

“Yet rather I unfettered would abide  
Without the cloister ; for I love the sun  
And bright, blithe things, and would not darkly  
glide,  
Like hidden stream, among the shadows dun ;  
But, like some mountain beck, rejoicing run  
And leap with singing over crag and moss  
In sunlight. Now, sweet mother, I have done ;  
The morning ages, and the lindens toss  
Their arms in joy, and shake their new robes' silken  
gloss.

## XLIII.

“Come out, and joy thee in the merry May  
Before it fades.” Then rose the widowed queen,  
And, set on palfreys fair, they took their way  
Down from the hoary burg through alleys green.  
And many a courtly dame, in satin sheen,  
And fair-haired page, silk-suited, swelled their train,  
With maidens, brighter than the sunny scene  
Around them. Thus with dance and minstrel strain  
They filled the woods till eve blushed out in blood-  
red stain.

*SONG.*

Play on, play on  
In the merry May,  
Though the sisters are spinning  
By night and by day.

Sing on, sing on,  
While the world is young,  
Ere the dark hour strike  
On the iron tongue.

Laugh on, laugh on,  
While laugh you may;  
The swift hours are snatching  
Sweet youth away.

Dance on, dance on  
In the shining spring,  
Nor dream in the mad whirls  
What winter may bring.

Laugh on, laugh on,  
While the earth is so fair,  
Ere the soft-blowing woodlands  
Are leafless and bare.

Sing on, sing on;  
Over flower-bound brows  
Glooms the weird sisters' spinning  
By mystical boughs.



LAY THE SECOND

SIEGFRIED'S GLORY



## II.

### *PRELUDE*

### The Forest \*

O H, let us pierce the billowy gloom  
That greenly wraps the mountain-side,  
The woodland, clothing crest and coombe  
With beauty. There white lilies bloom,  
Silk-sheathed, beneath oak branches wide,  
Where sunlights slide.

A stag down yon green vista fleets,  
A thousand joyous insects hum ;  
High up the leafy archway meets,  
Tall lindens dream of summer sweets ;  
On deep-mossed pathways footfalls come,  
All hushed and dumb.

Sweet woodruff breaks in balmy snow  
Beneath the columned aisles of beech,  
Whose shining leaves the sunlight throw  
In dimmed and broken shafts below,  
I hear the nuthatch tap his breach,  
And the cuckoo's speech.

Oh, the life and the joy of the gay greenwood,  
The glad live things that glance and play,  
The song that falls in a silvery flood,  
The beast in his lair and the bird with her brood,  
The bees, and the blossoms that light the way  
In the greenwood gay !

Beneath this mighty oaken dome,  
Where gnarled boughs gather a hoary gloom,  
By silvery birch and prickly holm,  
Beneath the princely beeches, roam  
To a glade where the light fern lifts his plume  
And the whitethorns bloom,

Roam on, and leave the weary world,  
And all its striving, all its care ;  
Look down on the wave that is gently swirled  
By the linden roots, all mossed and pearled  
With wet ; look back at the vaultings fair  
The beech-shafts bear.

Here belike, in the olden time,  
Some maiden, bound in a dim, dread spell,  
Sat spinning in beauty beneath the lime,  
When she heard the hunter's music chime,  
And the fair prince saw her beside the well,  
And loosed her spell.

Sweet is the glade with shade and sun  
And the quiet speech of wave and wind ;  
'T is sweet, the sands of noontide run,  
To pace the pine-wood's cloister dun,  
Whose red-ribbed vaults of branches twined  
To sun are blind.

This is the fane of the dim Unseen,  
Of hidden powers high and vast ;  
An awful stillness breathes serene,  
Though deep-toned chants roll up between,  
As the black roof sighs to the long-drawn blast  
That is sweeping past.

A grey light gleams beyond the pines,  
Where a torrent roars by a rock-built tower,  
Then gloom anew the lofty lines  
Of pillared stems ; the day declines ;  
And now the sprites of the wood have power  
At the glooming hour.

The pine-wood breaks ; a crimson sun  
Fires all the rugged mountain walls.  
What treasure rests in the caverns dun,  
Deep where the day has never shone ;  
What jewels gleam in the echoing halls,  
Where no foot falls.

Far beneath, the elfin guard,  
Low of stature, swart of limb,  
With glittering eyes keep watch and ward ;  
Woe to him who, evil-starred,  
Meets them in their caverns dim,  
Those watchers grim !

And woe to whom by sweet moonlight  
The water-spirits' revel breaks,  
Or sees the strange and lovely sight  
Of dancing elves and gnomes by night ;  
If the elfin song his spirit takes  
No more he wakes.

It is an eerie thing by night  
To pace the forest's long arcades,  
Where myriad things beyond the sight  
Move darkling, where the moon gleams white  
In doubtful shapes on distant glades,  
Beyond the shades.

The glow-worm's lantern greenly beams,  
And white stars pierce the opening roof ;  
Come cheerly on, though the world of dreams  
Breathes heavily round, and the wolf's eye gleams  
From under the covert's leafy woof,  
Where he watches aloof ;

Come cheerly on! Deep, deep below

The forest slopes dark to the river's brim.

But yonder I see a ruddy glow ;

Are they dwarfs or gnomes, whose shadows go,

Fitful and wild in the firelight dim,

Are they spectres grim ?

Nor gnome nor sprite, but of mortal mould,

They move by the charcoal-burner's fire ;

Rough hands, warm hearts, and spirits bold,

Their bitter sweat for scant bread sold ;

Here is their hut with its little byre

By the dark fir spire.

Here we may rest in the fitful glow,

Couched king-like on sweet boughs of pine,

And watch the weird, wild lustre show

Black sprays above, red stems below, -

While we pledge our host in the country wine,

And the sweet stars shine.

The red light plays on his wind-beat face,

While he tells his legend and sings his song.

On a sudden he stops for a little space,

And crosses himself, as a sound of grace,

A chapel bell, steals sweet along

The vaulting strong.

Nor sprite, nor fay, nor kobold grim  
Hath power while the sweet bell rings ;  
Birds sleep upon the great oak's limb,  
Beasts prow! among the shadows dim ;  
Now slumber sinks with folded wings  
Till morning springs.

What dreams will hold the sleepers' souls,  
The sleepers breathing balmy pine?  
The forest's murmur round them rolls,  
The stars sweep on in glittering shoals,  
The night-wind whispers thoughts divine  
In music fine.



*LAY THE SECOND***Siegfried's Glory**

## I.

**H**E stood against the newly-risen sun,  
Before his father's gates ; a golden haze,  
Like to a regal vesture, featly spun  
And richly broidered in a wandering maze  
Of leaf and flower, of bright and broken rays,  
Swept round his lofty form's heroic mould ;  
Godlike he stood, his armour made a blaze  
Red-glowing in the sun's fresh-burnished gold,  
His shield and spear and sword, rich-jewelled,  
glittered cold ;

## II.

Upon his lip young manhood's early bloom  
Lay lightly, his blue eyes were dewy clear ;  
The crest that clasped his helmet's floating plume  
A flying dragon seemed, and all his gear  
Was bossed or graven with this shape of fear,  
So that all men, beholding, Siegfried knew,  
Siegfried, the child of Sigmund, who with spear  
And sword, undreading, the fierce dragon slew,  
And from the secret caves the guarded treasure  
drew.

## III.

Thus stood he smiling in the new-rayed sun ;  
    Around him grouped his men, a gallant train.  
With treasure laden, by his prowess won,  
    And Sigmund's gifts, robes richly dyed in grain,  
    Armour and gems and ruddy gold—bright bane  
Of human hearts—a score of waggons rolled.  
    Queen Siegelind to keep the lad was fain,  
Full sore she wept and straitly did enfold  
Her glorious son in arms that could not loose their  
    hold.

## IV.

And all who dwelt within the princely hall  
    At Santen, built beside the unresting Rhine,  
Had issued forth, and by the towers tall  
    Stood gazing in the morning's early shine ;  
    And many an eager soul did inly pine  
To follow Siegfried on his knightly quest,  
    To drink with him of peril's quickening wine,  
And bright fame pluck from battle's horrent crest ;  
But Sigmund spake of fears within his boding breast.

## V.

“Sore I misdoubt me, fair and noble son,”  
    He said, “if this thy quest may bring thee good ;  
Unboding, ere thy glory had begun  
    Or thy bright blade yet drunk of any blood,

As a man lifts a noble falcon's hood  
And shows the quarry, did I bid thee go,  
When, like the unblossomed rose, in silken snood  
Deep-folded, thy great powers far below  
Thine outward seeming lay in lustre soon to glow.

## VI.

"I saw thee go, I saw thee come again  
With joy; I sent thee empty from my side,  
In tenderest youth, unproven, with no rein  
To curb thee, save thy young will purified  
By prayer. And soon thou brought'st me bliss  
and pride  
And sword-won treasure, O heroic son!  
But now thou goest, full of glory, tried  
In peril, mightier than any one  
Of woman born—yet I this quest for thee would  
shun.

## VII.

"Thy mother weeps, with secret fears oppressed  
And omens, such as gloom on wifely soul  
Unstained; and could we hold thee from thy quest  
Nor spot thine honour, then were bitter dole  
Spared the warm hearts where kindled first the coal  
Of thy bright life—yet it were better far  
To see thee lifeless, wrapped in bloody stole,  
Than that vile ease or sloth thy fame should mar,  
And thou from honour's heaven shouldst sweep, a  
fallen star."

## VIII.

Then fair and courteously Prince Siegfried said,  
 (His sunny face with hope and joy alight),  
 "Fair sire, sweet mother, on this quest is laid  
 My honour ; I have sworn on faith of knight  
 To win the fairest, under heaven's bright  
 And starry round ; and did I fail to try  
 My fortune, knowing her ye ken in sight  
 Of all men fairest, then would red shame dye  
 My name—yet would I not woe on your hearts  
 should lie.

## IX.

"And wherefore dread ye? To the deathful dance  
 Of crimsoned spears I go not, but in peace  
 To win the light of beauty's beamy glance  
 In bloodless battle, and a maid release,  
 Not from fire-breathing dragon, but the ease  
 Of white, unwakened, maiden fantasy ;  
 Ye know me strong in fight, I pray you cease  
 Your grieving, speed my parting cheerily,  
 And bless me that I go with spirit sorrow-free."

## X.

He spoke and bowed him ; on his sunny hair  
 The fresh light played, and all around him shone.  
 The princely parents sped with words of prayer  
 Their mighty child ; the liegemen, one by one,

Bade farewell. Then, all words of parting done,  
The hero leapt upon his armoured steed,  
And moving gleamed as sheathed in molten sun,  
Smiled joyous farewell ; then with easy speed  
The cloud of shining spears waned slowly to a bead

## XI.

And ceased. Within the hall the parents went,  
Musing on Siegfried's deeds and all his might,  
But chiefly how the tidings first were sent  
Of Chriemhild's beauty. It was one wild night  
Of that tempestuous moon whose fitful light  
Is kindled on the April side of Yule ;  
The turrets shook with storm, the hall was bright  
With flaming cresset, warm with glowing fuel,  
Where men sat safe and heard the hurt winds wail  
and pule.

## XII.

So fierce a night it was, the song and tale  
That oft beguile the warman's hearth were still ;  
The rugged music of the rattling hail,  
The war-god's arrows, and the wailings shrill  
Of baffled spirits wreaking their wild will  
In tempest on the burg's embattled towers,  
Held the strong warriors' hearts with awe, until  
A flash of green fire lit the sleety showers,  
Gleamed in the hall and passed, and then the rolling  
powers

## XIII.

Of Thor's deep thunder all the heavens broke,  
And Siegfried's men upstarted, unawares,  
When a tall pinnacle beneath the stroke  
Fell crashing, so that men, in the swift glares  
Out-gazing from the pane with dazzled stares,  
Saw the stone crumble in the court below ;  
Then gathered the strong fury of the airs  
And smote the oaken gates so fierce a blow,  
The hasps and staples snapped, and slowly to and fro

## XIV.

The heavy gates swung grating on the yard—  
All heard them in the lulling of the wind.  
Then rose the Dragon-slayer and unbarred  
The hall door, gazing out if he might find  
Some foe, but all was lost in darkness blind.  
Then forth into the gusty storm he fared,  
With many warriors following behind ;  
And each man in the dark his weapon bared,  
And fierce, as if in fight, into the blackness glared.

## XV.

Now when they reached the gate the moon outbroke  
In sudden glory from a fissured cloud,  
And, as the youthful prince his challenge spoke,  
He saw the figure of an old man bowed

By years ; a monk's gray garment his sole shroud  
From storm ; upon his white and reverend head

The keen sleet drove and railed the tempest loud,  
And forth-leapt blades fierce radiance on him shed ;  
Him the prince gently hailed, and through the  
rough storm led.

## XVI.

He led him to the warm and lighted hall,

Nor spake the old man any word until  
His robe was shaken from its snowy pall,

Then, wet and wind-beat, pausing on the sill,  
He cried, " Goodwill to men of honest will ! "

So, blessing, entered that great hall of kings.

Then suddenly the roaring blast was still,  
The wearied tempest folded his wild wings  
And slept, like Furies charmed by Orpheus' golden  
strings.

## XVII.

All rose to do the old man reverence

While the prince led him to the crackling pine,  
And he, outglancing from the pent-house dense  
And gray, that shadowed his deep-burning eyne,  
Marked well the stature tall and features fine  
Of Siegfried, and he smiled a subtle smile ;

Spreading thin hands before the blaze—a sign  
He made, low murmuring in his beard the while—  
Then watched the hero move and speak in princely  
style.

## XVIII.

There lay a shadow on the lustrous brow  
Of Siegfried, and his eyes with brooding thought  
Were darkened; for within his soul a vow  
Burned stilly and to high emprise him wrought;  
A fairy dream in golden mesh had caught  
His springing manhood, and all things seemed stale  
And profitless until he should have brought  
That lovely, lofty dream within the pale  
Of breathing, warm-blood life, and raised its  
shadowy veil.

## XIX.

And this sweet mystery his spirit took  
With longing past all speech. Long time the dream  
Had stirred within the deep and crystal brook  
Of consciousness: when morning's youngest beam  
Touched the far, misty hills with rosy gleam,  
His soul was haunted by a loveliness  
Beyond all thought; at evening still, supreme  
It swayed him, till his longing's passionate stress  
Wrought it to maiden semblance, tall, with floating  
tress

## XX.

Of purest, beamiest gold; and deep, sweet eyes  
Held his, awake or sleeping, in rapt gaze,  
With mystic power like that of winter skies,  
When large white stars flood all the trackless  
ways



And all night long in silent glory blaze :  
Then in devotion to that lovely thing  
His strong soul bowed, and old heroic lays  
Swept deeper, stronger, through the tuneful string  
Of life, and all his thoughts soared up on mightier  
wing.

## XXI.

Till a most deadly weight of loneliness  
Crushed blank upon him ; then at times a sound  
Of silvery speech his thrilling ear would bless ;  
Anon swift spells of deep emotion bound  
His soul and all his powers in magic wound ;  
So in the silence of his secret breast  
The stir within a path to action found,  
And Siegfried vowed to seek the loveliest  
And win ; but never this to living wight confessed.

## XXII.

Thus with the prince it fared, and thus his brow  
Was shadowed, and all present joys were vain.  
In his soul's inmost cell he nursed the vow,  
Brooding on nobler deeds and vaster gain  
Of glory, till his glorious youth with pain  
He viewed, as all unworthy in the light  
Of maiden glances ; for the instinctive strain  
Of Nature lifts fair souls to summits bright,  
Keen-aired and pure: thus seemed it in the stranger's  
sight.

## XXIII.

And ever held he in his burning gaze  
The Dragon-slayer, moving in the hall.  
Now, while this old man rested by the blaze,  
The serving-folk brought meats, and set them all  
On tables in the light of torches tall  
By warriors borne. And then with music came  
The king and queen ; beneath a golden pall  
They sat on high, enringed with knight and dame,  
And bards to citherns sang brave deeds of olden  
fame.

## XXIV.

Then flowed red wine and golden gleaming mead,  
And on the singers fell a fire divine :  
Of ancient gods, who ruled before the creed  
Of Christ, the king, dark places made to shine,  
And of dim things that boded their decline,  
Of Vala, Valkyr, of the dwellings fair  
Of gods, the mighty snake whose coils entwine  
The world beneath that tree whose branches bear  
All living things—they sang, and powers of earth  
and air ;

## XXV.

“ Their glory and their strength have passed away,  
And fallen is every bright and awful throne,”  
So sang, compassionate of vanished sway,  
Those bards in wild and wailful minor tone.

Then the old man his wanderings made known  
From shrine to shrine in countries strange and far,  
Till every listening face seemed carven stone,  
Nor dared men breathe, lest they his tale should mar;  
His words in music rang like some deep-chiming  
star.

## XXVI.

Yea, and the king and queen hung breathlessly  
Upon the strange charm of the old man's tongue;  
Anon they asked themselves, "How may it be  
That he such music from the stars hath wrung?"  
The cressets flickered and the arras, hung  
Around, waved all its broidered mimicry  
Of battle, chase, and lute by lover strung,  
As stirred by airs divine. Then suddenly  
He ceased, and all sprang up as from a spell  
set free.

## XXVII.

Now when the feast was ended, and the queen  
And king withdrawn, all gathered in the glow  
Of high-stacked logs, the while the guest, with mien  
Unchanged, spake on to all the listening row;  
He spake of beauty: "Many maids I know,  
Fair, wise, and noble, but the fairest flower,  
The princeliest, the purest earth can show,  
Blooms sweet and still in far, secluded bower  
At Worms, where brethren three sway one united  
power."

## XXVIII.

As when a spark leaps from a hunter's fire  
And, snatched by winds, is dropped on moorland  
brake  
Sun-dried, the waste is wrapped in garment dire  
Of sudden flame, nor dew nor rain may slake,  
So fared the prince ; he felt his bright dream wake  
To breathing bloom, felt all the smouldering heat  
Within his bosom blaze, great yearnings take  
His breathless soul in Love's strong spell and  
sweet ;  
Then mused he what high deed to win her would  
be meet.

## XXIX.

And, as the vermeil deepens in the rose  
When the young day leaps through the flame-  
barred east,  
Till crimson glory from its portal flows,  
Stirring warm nests and wakening bird and beast,  
So the firm red in Siegfried's face increased,  
Hearing this ancient man of Chriemhild tell ;  
And much he questioned ; nor would he have  
ceased  
But that the sage on other subjects fell,  
Charming his listeners' hearts, he spake so wise  
and well.

## XXX.

He spake so well, that all things heard him fain,  
Warman and serving-man and hawk and hound,  
Even carved and painted men and flames, the  
chain  
Of eloquence so mightily enwound,  
That they warm sentient life a moment found ;  
And round the hoary sage with chime of bell  
The hawks, by dreaming falconer unbound,  
Pressed closely ; no one marked them in the  
spell,  
And how the long night closed not one at morn  
could tell.

## XXXI.

And of the stranger they no trace could find,  
But each man marvelled had he dreamed a  
dream ;  
His wild words seemed as when sleep's coils unwind  
From waking souls in morning's dewy beam,  
And they of fleeting glories vaguely deem,  
Striving in vain to grasp the vanished clue  
Of arrowy joys, that pass with fitful gleam  
Athwart the brain's dark chamber. These things  
threw  
On Chriemhild's name a light of bale that daily  
grew.

## XXXII.

But Siegfried held him closely to his oath  
And straight began his journey to prepare ;  
Nor did his sire restrain though sorely loth  
To send him. Thus, when April's tender air  
Breathed sun and shower on field and forest bare,  
And prisoned life burst forth in loveliness,  
And Nature, maid-like, blushed to find so fair  
Her beauty in her fresh, flower-cinctured dress,  
Forth fared he, deeply drawn by spring's life-giving  
stress.

## PART II.

## Siegfried's Glory

## I.

**I**N the soft splendour of an April noon  
The travellers paused upon the Rhineland shore;  
The first pale flush of summer's leafy boon  
Touched elm and hazelwood, white cloudlets bore  
Shadow and sunlight in their voyage o'er  
A dim, deep sky, as full of mystery  
As olden Saga ; where oak branches hoar  
Warm coppice hid, heart-stirring melody  
Came flooding, liquid, pure and rich from blossomed  
tree ;

## II.

The cuckoo called, the glancing swallow swept  
In airy curve, and hummed the roving bee ;  
In Siegfried's heart spring's mighty pulses leapt,  
Earth laughed with lustihood and jollity :  
Then a swart Niblung, from a lofty tree,  
The kingly towers and spires of Worms descried,  
So fared they forward over blossomed lea,  
And reached the castle by the river side  
And paused in glittering ranks above the azure tide.

## III.

Now the three kings beheld that bright array,  
From a high donjon, and they marvelled all,  
Musing who might he be that held in sway  
Those warmen, Niblung swart and Teuton tall ;  
The armoured splendours and the golden pall  
On laden wains, the gems, with wonderment  
They viewed, and deepest awe on them did fall  
Of Siegfried's strength and beauty ; and they sent  
For Hagen, liegeman true, their wonder to content.

## IV.

Von Troneck Hagen, who in many lands  
Had wandered, and all famous heroes knew,  
All manners strange and tongues ; he, their com-  
mands  
Receiving, swiftly came ; long glanced he through  
The narrow casement ; then deep breath he drew  
And said, " All noble heroes have I known  
Save him who won the Niblung gold and slew  
The dragon, and the sightless cloak alone  
From Alberich tore ; his fame from land to land is  
blown."

## V.

Then spake he briefly of the glorious deeds  
Of Siegfried, ere his manhood's full-dawned morn ;  
How all alone, unvexed by dainty needs,  
He wandered, armoured fully by his scorn



Of evil, and all wights of succour lorn  
He succoured, and from evil magic freed  
Much people, and, by noble yearnings borne,  
Pressed on o'er barren hill and blossomed mead  
Into a weird, wild wood and wrought his mightiest  
deed.

## VI.

That forest gloomed beneath a blasted heath,  
Deep, dark, and sunless, chill as moulding tomb ;  
Siegfried, like one adream, drew from its sheath  
His shining sword, as if some evil doom  
He felt before him through the shadows loom ;  
And onward pressed beneath the mazes hoar  
Of thickly branching oaks in deepening gloom ;  
Those gray-haired kings the rose-beams never wore  
From fresh Aurora's brow, or Dian's silvery ore ;

## VII.

Nor ever blaze of noon or star-beam fell  
Through the thick folding of that living roof,  
No flower that loves the sun her dainty bell  
Swayed in the breeze, no blossom-braided woof  
Of moss, soft-spreading, dumb'd the passing hoof ;  
A ragged undergrowth of tangled brush  
Strayed in fantastic shapes and held aloof  
The band of princely trunks, and in the hush  
Anon some evil beast made sudden stealthy rush.

## VIII.

The hero made a lustre in the gloom,  
Like diamond dropped in beauty's raven hair,  
And nowise paled his cheeks' young healthy bloom,  
His sunny curls illumed the dusky air,  
His drawn sword flashed with fitful lightning glare;  
Firm and serene the tangled path he trod,  
Now baffled, like a bright bird in a snare,  
Now smitten by the quick rebounding rod  
Of ash or oak, now sunk in lush, marsh-nourished  
sod.

## IX.

Only a strange oppression weighed his heart,  
And checked his strong breath in the heavy air ;  
Now glittering serpents on his path would dart,  
And now he roused a fierce beast from its lair ;  
As moves a brave man, gnawed by myriad care,  
With dreadless front and never-conquered will,  
So moved the undaunted prince ; and now a stair,  
Steep-breathed, the path seems, climbing sudden hill,  
Here giant pines, deep-rooted, balmy scents distil.

## X.

So fared he till he gained a heathery glade,  
High up, and heard afar a torrent roar ;  
Athwart the sandy waste his way he made,  
When a vast moving shadow loomed before,

And lo ! a giant clad in wolf-skin bore  
Upon him, whom the prince full gently hailed ;  
Then the wild man, not bred in courteous lore,  
The youth for answer with his staff assailed,  
But Siegfried's sword leapt forth so swift, the giant  
    quailed

## XI.

And abjectly the prince's grace implored,  
That Siegfried granted with a light disdain ;  
Then spake the man of Niblung's golden hoard,  
Of damsel bound in rude oppression's chain,  
And him would guide across the wind-shorn plain.  
So on they fared in converse, till the guide  
The youth unguarded found and smote again,  
But the brave boy the huge beam dashed aside  
And fought the giant fell and smote him that he died.

## XII.

And then, forspent and worn with heavy strife,  
Down sank the prince upon his bossy shield,  
Musing the words of him whose streaming life  
Made round his carcase huge a crimson field,  
When on the wind an anguished crying pealed,  
Far borne ; full swiftly then the hero rose  
And onward pressed in triple daring steeled,  
Jagged steeps around in narrowing chasm did close  
And mountains soared above him into gleaming  
    snows.

## XIII.

Below his feet a deep gorge darkly yawned,  
With forest clothed ; far down a river rolled ;  
And lo ! a fearsome brood by demon spawned,  
Fire-breathing, sharp-winged, from the rocky hold  
Swarmed out and clanged around him ; then four-  
fold

In agony, arose the cry again ;  
Well wist he then the mountain held the gold  
Of Niblung far in darkly winding vein,  
And he exulting smote the dragon swarm amain.

## XIV.

The lofty joy that noble spirits feel  
On life's high summit, when their utmost might  
Is tested, and, as stricken stone to steel,  
Long hidden fire they yield, whose sudden light  
Leaps up enkindling flames that quench the night,  
Thrilled all the deeps of Siegfried's mighty soul ;  
And while he smote, more radiantly bright  
His bright face grew ; but dark, despairing dole  
Seized the gold guards, who felt earth's deep-sunk  
pillars roll.

## XV.

They felt earth's pillars roll beneath the storm  
Of that fierce fight and trembled far within ;  
Without, a cloud of fire enwrapped the form  
Of Siegfried, his fierce-smitten shield a din

Tremendous made ; out of the mail-sheathed skin  
Of those winged monsters hissing crimson poured,  
And some adown the gorge with rapid spin  
Fell lifeless, till before that deadly sword  
The whole fierce dragon swarm fled trembling,  
slashed and gored.

## XVI.

Then Siegfried paused victorious, but his blood  
Flowed fast, though he not felt it in the glow ;  
Wiping his brand, he mused how he the flood  
Might cross, that boiled with giddy swirl below,  
And scale the rocky stronghold of his foe,  
When the dim air grew black with hissing smoke  
And a long serpent sailed on pinion slow  
Athwart the darkened sky ; fire-torrents broke  
From his deep-caverned eyes and wrapped him like  
a cloak.

## XVII.

Now Siegfried's nostril quivered, and his breath  
Came chokingly, but he with steadfast gaze  
Defiant looked upon that swooping death ;  
His back against the rocky wall he stays,  
His good shield lifts against the blinding blaze,  
His long spear plants ; the dragon's hovering pause  
With torturing malice he long time delays,  
Until with sudden swoop the sharp crook'd claws  
Clutch round the prince and flame him blinds from  
gaping jaws.

## XVIII.

In giddy circle through the blasted air  
The dragon rose with his unconquered prey ;  
Then came a struggle fiercer than despair,  
Till Siegfried's keen-edged blade a secret way  
Beneath the jointed scales found ; in dismay  
And pain the monster lashed his barbèd tail  
And roared that shepherds heard him far away  
By folded flocks ; then through the hero's mail  
His strong teeth crashed ; with pain the boy's flushed  
cheek grew pale,

## XIX.

And he had well-nigh swooned for agony,  
But that his strong heart rose in that fierce throe,  
And in the dragon's throat so suddenly  
He thrust his sword, he made a great vein flow  
In the unarmoured flesh ; with gurgles low  
The monster's teeth and claws relaxed their hold,  
And for pure pain the noble prey let go ;  
In many a dizzy turn the hero rolled  
Through sinking air, till prone he struck upon the  
mould,

## XX.

And there bereft of consciousness he lay,  
Like crushed lamb dropped from stricken eagle's  
claw,  
While the great wounded dragon in dismay  
Flew to his stronghold, pouring from his jaw

Hot flaming blood, until the fissure raw  
He stanch'd ; then forth he flew again with roar  
Far-pealing, and his vast tail like a saw  
All jagged cut the air ; his great vans tore  
The clouds, as he above the lessening mountain bore.

## XXI.

Now Siegfried on the farther side was dropped  
Of the dark torrent, swirling deep below,  
And though awhile his great heart's pulses stopped  
For lack of blood and fury of his blow,  
Life's deep-laid current soon regained its flow  
And he, awaking from his heavy swoon,  
Saw linden boughs sway gently to and fro,  
And round his limbs he felt the grateful boon  
Of deep-piled moss, and all his powers he gathered  
soon.

## XXII.

Yet would he fain have rested for a space,  
Safe-hid in moss and fern, but that wild cry  
Of maiden mew'd in evil hiding place,  
Pealed out again in deepening agony ;  
Then leapt he to his feet, resolved to die  
At least in succour of that helpless one,  
And as he moved, he saw the monster, high  
Outspread in air, enwreathed by vapour dun,  
And felt exulting strength through all his pulses  
run.

## XXIII.

So scents the steed the battle from afar,  
 Shaking with joy his thunder-clothèd mane ;  
 In fancy down the bloody ranks of war  
 He flashes, and he treads the pallid slain  
 With iron heel, as men the golden grain  
 For life's sustaining bruise ; with shrilling cry  
 He bounds exulting o'er the windy plain,  
 Nor recks he of the dreadful agony  
 Of screaming steed death-struck, so he in fight  
 may be.

## XXIV.

Siegfried betook him to a deep-niched cleft,  
 By fire-throe ruptured in the living rock,  
 And scarce his gleaming blade in hand he heft  
 Ere the fierce dragon pounced with stunning  
 shock  
 Upon him, safe immured in granite block ;  
 And though the mountain shudders to its heart,  
 And the swayed trees their crests together knock,  
 Siegfried is scathless ; but the guardians swart  
 Of Niblung's golden hoard with bristling hair  
 upstart.

## XXV.

Dark clouds of smoke with fire commingled rolled  
 So thickly, Siegfried scanty breathing found,  
 Like warriors in a city's central hold,  
 When storming foes have scaled the ramparts  
 bound,



And the strong citadel with flame surround ;  
But soon the baffled monster rose again  
On mighty wheel and measured all the ground,  
Like a skilled captain who would lay his train  
Beneath a stone-walled town and raze it to the  
plain.

## XXVI.

Then Siegfried's pulses leapt and forth he came,  
Unsheltered in free air, with joyous cheer ;  
Where his foot smote, away rolled eddying flame,  
Like clouds that part in fire when morn leaps  
clear  
Above the dark hill-tops ; devoid of fear,  
The hero saw with bright and steadfast eye  
The fiery creature through the air-waves steer,  
Its gleaming armour lit with varied dye,  
And, like Thor's wielded bolt, shoot thundering  
from the sky.

## XXVII.

The prince's heart throbbed, yet he swervèd not,  
But met the monster with uplifted sword,  
And, seeking carefully a jointed spot  
In th' armoured trunk, straight towards the vitals  
bored ;  
A blinding flood about the smiter poured,  
And the hurt monster with spasmodic clutch

The boy tight gripped and through his cuisses  
gored  
And left him, but, before a second touch,  
Siegfried his shelter reached and breathed, rejoicing  
much.

## XXVIII.

Then frenzied fury seized that dragon fierce,  
And on the rock he beat with frantic blows  
Wings, tail, and body ; but he could not pierce  
Where Siegfried housed ; so, under soft-piled  
snows  
Unfrosted, some fair plant whose life stream flows  
Towards the spring, resists the icy blast  
That overhead in whirling tempest goes ;  
He stood, as he in sculptor's mould were cast,  
To smite with all his strength one furious blow and  
last.

## XXIX.

Then the swart watchers trembled far within,  
Feeling the quivers of the pillared mine,  
They feared the mountain's falling in the din  
And rooting up, like tempest-smitten pine ;  
So, whispering together, they combine  
To bear the treasure forth before the crash  
Their blood should mingle with the jewels' shine ;  
The heavy ore upon their backs they lash,  
Thus, in day's dying beam, red gold and diamonds  
flash.

## XXX.

But Siegfried, all unwitting their dismay,  
    Stood gathered for his fierce and final blow,  
And smote at last so true and sure, its way  
    His steel found to the vitals of his foe ;  
Fierce writhed the dragon in his dying throes,  
And stiffened all along the mountain side,  
    And from his corse a fiery overflow  
Of hissing blood poured out in mighty tide,  
Most like the flaming wave that threads Hell's  
    champain wide.

## XXXI.

Then Siegfried rested in the ruddy glow  
    Of eve, forspent and wounded by the fight ;  
In thankful joy he marked the overthrow  
    Of the huge beast and marvelled at his might ;  
Thus, stayed upon his sword, his features bright  
And shining hair all marred with blood and smoke,  
    In prayer lost, a swiftly kindling light  
Like tropic sea-dawn o'er his visage broke,  
When he the lady saw, unprisoned by his stroke.

## XXXII.

Who was that lady ? and what evil spell,  
    By what enchantments forged, upon her lay ?  
What anguish tore her heart, in what dim cell ?  
    Of what dark tyranny was she the prey ?

What to the prince did that sweet lady say,  
Smiling before him in the sunset glow?

And whither wandered she at shut of day?  
Bring back lost bloom of forty years ago,  
But this from Hagen's lips let no man hope to know.

## XXXIII.

Now, when that lady left him, in the tide  
Of hissing blood he plunged, of raiment spoiled;  
Thus he endued himself on every side  
With viewless armour, as about him coiled  
The hot wave in the dragon's fierce heart boiled;  
Thence issued he, as carved in marble white,  
All wounds healed, and as he had never toiled,  
Of loftier stature and of greater might,  
Unwoundable, and clothed in beauty manlier bright.

## XXXIV.

But ere the bath, a fluttering lime-leaf fell  
Between his mighty shoulders, so that spot  
Escaped the sheathing. Now the unseen shell  
So strong was that the steel is forgèd not,  
The beast unborn, unkindled yet the hot  
Flame's breath of power to pierce it. Raiment  
brought  
The courtly dwarfs, bright-hued and fair, and got  
Him armour, rich and curiously wrought  
In the deep underworld by sun or star unsought.

## XXXV.

And all the treasure of the Niblung hoard,  
Rich-hearted ruby, sardius, sapphire blue,  
Silver and burning gold, long darkly stored,  
They piled in glowing heaps before his view ;  
There flashed the diamond's drop of fiery dew,  
The emerald's flame, the beryl's sea-tinged light,  
The opal's sweet and ever-changing hue,  
The moon-rayed pearl ; they made the gloaming  
bright,  
Siegfried, beholding them, saw not the gathering  
night.

## XXXVI.

But gazed with dim, fixed glance, as one by power  
Of glamour held. The sun was two hours gone,  
Dead from the west fell day's last paling flower,  
Earth gloomed, woods drowsed, Heav'n's purple  
plains were strown  
With dewy stars, a young moon paced alone,  
With virginal calm glance, the orient height,  
The hushed flood murmured low, a misty zone  
Lay curling round the mountain, ghostly white,  
When Siegfried saw an army moving through the  
night.

## XXXVII.

They moved with noiseless footfall down the glen,  
The still air fluttered not their banners bright ;  
Prince Siegfried marvelled, were they living men,  
Or phantoms woven of the moonbeams white ?

Up rose the dwarfs, all trembling at the sight,  
Crying, "Niblung and Schilbung's hosts behold!"

Then in night's shadows raged a deadly fight,  
And when the fresh dawn kissed the mountain cold  
She touched a crownless king and conquered host  
with gold.

## XXXVIII.

Thus Siegfried won the realm and golden store  
Of Niblung; many noble deeds beside  
He wrought, remembered well in minstrel lore;  
The cloak of darkness, that from sight could hold  
Who wore it, he could all securely glide  
Through throngs of armed foes in summer noon,  
From the dwarf Alberich he tore, and, dyed  
In darkness, things he wrought beneath the moon,  
Whence glorious fame he reaped that will not  
moulder soon.

## XXXIX.

This Hagen briefly told in quick rough speech,  
With rapid glances from his burning eyes.  
Then mused the kings if it were churlish breach  
Of courtesy to close their gates; but wise  
Was Hagen, and they feared him. "I advise,"  
He said, half scornful, "this strong Dragon-slayer  
To welcome friendly, lest he wrathful rise  
And crush us!" So they spake the stranger fair,  
Who crossed their sill and cast a splendour on the  
air.

## XL.

He crossed their sill, and Gunther's soul was drawn  
In yearning to the kingly stranger's soul,  
Each looked at each, and then began the dawn  
Of their strong friendship, that such joy and dole  
Should bring, for clear as on illumined scroll  
Each in the other's eyes saw "brother" writ.  
The youthful kings and all the glittering shoal  
Of courtiers to the guest did honour fit,  
And thus for weal and woe his fate with theirs was  
knit.

## XLI.

Now as the splendid following glanced across  
The threshold, from a narrow lattice-pane  
Looked Chriemhild in the court; a blood-red floss  
Of broiding silk she chose, singing a strain  
Of careless song, but a swift sudden stain  
Of crimson touched her fair cheeks' tender bloom,  
When she beheld in strange and subtle pain  
Siegfried, with visor raised and floating plume,  
All sheathed in burnished mail, above his warmen  
loom.

## XLII.

She dropped her crimson floss, she stopped her song,  
She gazed with parted lip and startled eye,  
She gazed upon the dreadless hero long,  
She marked his gentle speech, his bearing high,

His kindly looks, his lofty courtesy ;  
 And while she gazed a gently pulsing bliss  
     Stole through her, till she breathed a long, long  
     sigh,  
 Then turned, half fearing she had done amiss,  
 To Uta, whispering low, " Sweet mother, who is  
     this ? "

## XLIII.

Then Siegfried many days at Worms abode,  
     Welcomed as would befit a puissant king.  
 At times through balmy greenwood glades they rode,  
     Glades flooded with the music of the spring,  
     And there the fleet-foot stag to bay would bring.  
 At night in hall great deeds of hoary eld  
     And lays of love impassioned minstrels sing ;  
 All passing hours the friends' hearts closer weld,  
 But from the hero's eyes Chriemhild is ever held.

## XLIV.

Days grow to weeks, weeks months, but never yet  
     Hath Siegfried breathed aloud his lady's name,  
 Hath Siegfried longing, loyal glances set  
     Upon the beauty whose far-rumoured fame  
     Fired his strong soul with such enduring flame ;  
 But from her secret bower the maiden gazed  
     With stolen glance when knights for martial game  
 Were met in lists below ; and when they praised  
 The stranger's skill her eyes with dewy lustre blazed.



## XLV.

No longer now dim tales from far-off days  
Of fair deeds shining through the mists of time,  
Her young companions' sweet and joyous lays,  
Not her well-sounded cithern's tuneful chime,  
Or garden, blooming bright in summer prime,  
Much pleased her ; oft at eve she mused apart,  
Or watched pale, pensive stars from hill-tops climb,  
Oft at her broiding frame from dreams would start,  
And blush, oft speak of things far distant from her  
heart.

## XLVI.

Now Uta marked the change with secret joy,  
Pale Uta, mother sage and widowed queen,  
Yet to her gentle child wrought no annoy  
By words, but made as if she had not seen ;  
Often she spake of Siegfried, when serene,  
Still hours she passed with Chriemhild and the kings ;  
Then Gunther praised with the impassioned mien  
Of friendship's youth his deeds and wanderings ;  
But Chriemhild silent heard as musing other things.

## XLVII.

With seemly rivalry of noble love  
King Gunther straitly scanned his goodly friend ;  
He marked his grace and courtliness, and strove  
To grasp his high ideal and amend  
His own by that, and all false seeming rend

From all within and all around ; yet thought  
 Never to equal him, but strength to spend  
 In manly striving. So his soul was caught  
 In friendship's mighty bands, and so to high things  
 wrought.

## XLVIII.

And Siegfried's heart to all the brothers clave,  
 But most to Gunther. Soon the clang of arms  
 Rang from the east, where league-long forests wave ;  
 Such sound as warrior's eager spirit warms,  
 Presaging peril and the glorious harms  
 Of foughten field. It fell upon a day  
 When the young year was dressed in sweetest  
 charms,  
 The three Burgundian sovereigns went their way,  
 Heading a goodly host in war's superb array.

## XLIX.

The best and bravest of their men they chose  
 To try their cause in battle's desperate chance,  
 And Siegfried they besought to make their foes  
 His own, and with his sword their cause advance,  
 So, watched by maidens' stolen, shamefast glance,  
 As Gunther's man, by serving doubly great,  
 He went. Where swift sword-lightnings fiercest  
 dance,  
 Waved Siegfried's plume, and oft he turned the fate  
 Of nicely balanced war by his sole sword-point's  
 weight.

## L.

Beneath the Saxon mountains dwelt the foe,  
King Lintger ; and, to humble Burgundy,  
Lintgast of Denmark he had called from snow  
And ice, beyond the ever-troubled sea ;  
So these two kings against the brothers three  
Waged war. But, even to his furthest hold,  
For many days was Lintger made to flee,  
And Siegfried captured Lintgast, him with gold  
He chained, but set him free for goodly ransom told.

## LI.

And many noble deeds of arms were done  
On both sides in this war ; the two boy-kings,  
Gunther's young brothers, maiden honour won ;  
But Siegfried's glory floated on the wings  
Of rumour to the four winds' hidden springs ;  
And when to Worms his deeds' renown was blown,  
So strangely sudden joy a maid's heart wrings,  
Sweet Chriemhild's eyes with happy tear-drops  
shone,  
And to her bower she fled and mused apart alone.

## LII.

Twelve moons had gleamed and gloomed since  
Siegfried left  
His home at Santen ; now the springing year  
Again blushed maid-like, and with touches deft  
The meadows broidered, made the heaven clear,

And filled the woods with music. Then drew near  
The Whitsun feast, the feast of flower and song ;  
At Worms the home-come victors made great  
cheer  
With joust and revel, lasting twelve days long ;  
Thither from near and far flocked in a motley throng.

## LIII.

How glorious broke the dawn of that fair day  
When first Prince Siegfried met his lady's eyes,  
That Whitsun morn ! The Niblungs' stern array  
Around the court was ranged at still sunrise ;  
Before the kings the trumpets' stirring cries  
Rang boldly, chamberlains in cloth of gold  
Flashed forth in glowing file, as if the skies  
Had burst and all their glory earthward rolled ;  
Then followed high-born maids of beauty's sweetest  
mould.

## LIV.

Last came the queen, and, leaning on her arm,  
The princess, star-like in her loveliness,  
Her rich attire unmarked beside the charm  
Of her sweet beauty ; bright her flowing tress  
As Niblung gold, but earthward did she press  
Her looks, like one in stilly convent cell  
Who museth lone ; yet, once beneath the stress

Of Siegfried's glance she raised them, and the spell  
Of deep undying love on those young spirits fell.

## LV.

Then sudden red lit Chriemhild's gentle face,  
But Siegfried's darkened in a heavy cloud ;  
For when he marked the lady's lofty grace  
His heart sank low, his soul in homage bowed,  
As doubts and fears surged up in thickening  
crowd.

“ How should I win thee, oh thou loveliest ? ”

He inly sighed, yet he was passing proud  
That his long look one glance from her could wrest,  
And sweetest, strongest hopes swept through his  
troubled breast.

## LVI.

Then to the minster, over dewy grass,  
Beneath boughs fragrant with the breath of spring,  
All fared, in order due, to hear the mass.  
Oh, holy place ! where peasant, peer, and king,  
Maid, wife, and child bow equal ; where, on wing  
Of heaven-storming prayer, together rise  
So many hearts—the strong, the suffering,  
Dizzy with joy or over-bowed by woes,  
With souls that safe in bliss of Paradise repose !

## LVII.

There Siegfried prayed for Chriemhild, she for him,  
Their souls upborne upon the surge of song,  
That flooded nave and aisle and chapel dim  
With thankful praise the echoing vaults prolong  
To Him who wrought deliverance from wrong ;  
Loud prayed the priest ; fair children, snowy-stoled,  
With looks celestial, for the kneeling throng  
Swung jewelled censers chained with beamy gold,  
Whence clouds of heavenly balm around the altar  
rolled.

## LVIII.

And when the holy rites were fully done,  
And on the people's souls lay peace divine,  
Once more the bright procession in the sun  
Ranged round the castle-yard in ordered line.  
Then Gunther, with the old time's breeding fine,  
Prince Siegfried led before the royal maid  
For guerdon ; lowly did the prince incline  
To her, but spake no word till Chriemhild paid  
Him sweet and gracious thanks for his most timely  
aid.

## LIX.

Then, looking up, he saw her standing there,  
Enrined by sworded warrior, jewelled dame,  
And high-born damsel, so beyond compare  
The fairest, purest, princeliest, that shame

Fell on him, and his lips to shape her name  
Were fearful ; but her sweet and steadfast glance  
Met his and fired in each a deathless flame.  
Then said he, "Lady Chriemhild, what the chance  
Of battle gave is yours ; for you I lifted lance."

## LX.

The lady smiled, and even as the beam  
Of earliest morn the dark sea ruby dyes,  
With gradual touch on wood and shadowed stream,  
And round snow-peaks in awful splendour lies  
Till the last shadow leaves the lucid skies  
And full life breathes through all the wakened earth ;  
So the soft lustre of her lips and eyes  
The hero touched—his pulses leapt with mirth,  
His kindling features glowed with sense of life's  
new worth.

## LXI.

"And must I leave thee? lieber were I laid  
In loveless tomb, from sun and starshine hid."  
So Siegfried to his heart in silence said.  
Then heralds to the lists the warriors bid ;  
Like sunbeams in a wood, he glanced and slid  
Among the heroes—all around him whirled  
Slit scarves and broken weapons. What he did  
Chriemhild, with throbbing heart and lips upcurled,  
In wonder saw, and tears of pride her eyelids  
pearled.

## LXII.

Twelve days the revels lasted. All that time  
The prince in Chriemhild's sight with bliss abode :  
Now first he felt all things harmonious chime  
Within him ; but the hours so swiftly strode  
The feast was done, the guests upon their road  
Set forth, and sadly he to start prepared :  
Then Gunther prayed him, by the thanks they  
owed,  
To stay. Thus longer time their roof he shared,  
But still as yet no word of winning Chriemhild  
dared.



LAY THE THIRD

THE WINNING OF BRUNHILD



### III.

#### *PRELUDE*

**K** NOW ye the land, not set in any sea  
Of mariner sailed with sail of mortal loom,  
Where glows not fruit of any earth-grown tree,  
Where, stealing soul and sense, pale flowers  
bloom?

Know ye that land, so strange, so dim, so far,  
Not found on any chart by mortal limned,  
Not shone upon by sun or dewy star,  
But lit with lustre night hath never dimmed?

There spread waste tracts by mortal foot untrod,  
Where fitful lightnings dart in arrowy gleams,  
Where vague, weird figures brush the dewless sod,  
And voices pass unbodied as in dreams.

There jewelled palaces, by hands unwrought,  
Lift airy pinnacles from craggy heights,  
Rocks cleave and lighted halls appear unsought,  
Full of sweet song and perfume and delights.

There rivers murmur low through blossomed meads,  
And whoso sips their wave is lost to pain ;  
Weird tales are whispered by the bending reeds,  
That whoso hears is bound in magic's chain.

There are long galleries, that wind and wind,  
Like serpents, in a dark and endless maze  
Through spacious temples, where strong gods,  
reclined  
In joy, loom dimly through an incense haze.

And there are gardens, scented, blissful, bright,  
Dusk tangled forests, where trees speak and bleed,  
Where wanders many a mailed, immortal knight  
With damsel fair from dark enchantment freed.

Set sail and grasp the tiller firm, and far,  
Through tideless, stormless seas, that marvellous  
land,  
Unhelped by compass, chart, or pilot star,  
Seek, till the swift keel smite the waveless strand !

*LAY THE THIRD***The Winning of Brunhild**

## I.

**T**HERE dwelt a queen beyond the northern seas,  
 A maiden queen and fair, Brunhilda hight.  
 Full many a goodly warrior sought to please  
 That lady ; but alone by mortal fight  
 With her could any win the guerdon bright  
 Of her surpassing beauty ; mortal man  
 Not yet prevailed against her charmèd might ;  
 And whom she worsted lost his head, and wan  
 In death lay ; thus her dread through all the wide  
 world ran.

## II.

King Gunther heard her fame beside the Rhine,  
 Of Brunhild heard at Worms, his city old ;  
 And straight to win that lady did he pine ;  
 Her glorious beauty and her strength men told,  
 Her gifts, her form of more than queenly mould,  
 But chiefly of the all-compelling charm  
 Of peril, that her beauty fenced with fold  
 Impregnable and fraught with glorious harm,  
 That thrills the warrior's soul with rapture wild  
 and warm.

## III.

And oft in converse with the Dragon-slayer,  
 His tried and trusted friend, who now abode  
 At Worms for love of Chriemhild, his despair  
 And passioned longing for Brunhild he shewed ;  
 But Siegfried bid him win her, over-rode  
 His doubts, and offered help in the emprise,  
 For guerdon asking Chriemhild's hand bestowed ;  
 And, this being granted, he, in travel wise,  
 Gave counsel how to make the quest in fitting guise.

## IV.

No armoured host would he, but warriors twain,  
 Hagen and Dankwart. Many nights and days  
 Gold-tressèd Chriemhild and her maiden train  
 Consumed in shaping raiment meet to blaze  
 In splendour. Silk-stuffs from the sandy ways  
 Of Araby, pure flax, green silk from lands  
 More distant, wool and spoil of flocks that graze  
 Hoar ocean's opal meads and pearly sands,  
 She took and fashioned fair with deftly twinkling  
 hands.

## V.

Twelve suits of goodly raiment thus they made,  
 For each man three. And then at last it fell  
 On a sweet summer morn when sunbeams played  
 On blossoming vine, bright rose, and lily-bell,  
 Tipped barren peak and slipped to leafy dell,

Upon the broad blue bosom of the Rhine

The warriors sailed. To speed them with farewell  
Queen Uta and the princess did incline,  
Waiting with page and squire by sunny slopes of  
vine.

## VI.

The warriors seaward sailed their tiny bark ;

Siegfried the rudder held with practised hand,  
Gunther the oars, and Hagen's visage dark  
Above his baldric gloomed, when, from the land  
He pushed the boat ; but Dankwart took his stand  
Hard by the slender mast to hoist the sail ;

Long, long the ladies lingered on the strand,  
Watching the vessel dwindle to a pale  
Dim speck and slip within the massed air's azure  
veil,

## VII.

Adown the pleasant Rhine the wanderers sailed,

Where vine-bloom charmed the soft and delicate  
air,

Where cot and hamlet smiled, by woods half-veiled,  
Where children played, and maidens young and fair  
Sang spinning, shadowed from the summer glare ;  
And here on lofty crags strong towers frowned,  
And here a convent smiled at earthly care,  
Striving to shut sin from its narrow bound,  
Whence life's beat wave fell back with dull and  
hollow sound,

## VIII.

So fared they till, with many a yawning mouth,  
 Old Rhine reluctant crawled through weedy slime,  
 Bringing his tribute from the gentle south ;  
 There the green sea reared wide a crest sublime,  
 Lulling the mariners with wave-rung chime ;  
 Then Troneck Hagen turned his fiery gaze  
 On Siegfried, and would know how long a time  
 And through what perilous and secret ways  
 Their bark must sail to suit the weird witch-maiden's  
 craze.

## IX.

The bright-faced hero smiled, and said : "The ways  
 To me are known, brave Hagen." Then he steered  
 Northwest, well scanned by Hagen's burning gaze.  
 Twelve days and nights the ship's course never  
 veered,  
 But on they flew, and oft the long day cheered  
 With song and tale of old, heroic deeds,  
 Of ocean's secret lore, of creatures weird  
 Who draw charmed seamen to the silent meads  
 Below, and wreath pale brows with dank and  
 dripping weeds ;

## X.

Of still, bright palaces of burning gems  
 Beneath the heaving azure's shining floor,  
 Of shattered masts and tempest-broken stems,  
 Of treasure wrecked, deep-hid in caverns hoar,



Of silent mariners who may roam no more,  
 Of fairy isles that dream on halcyon wave,  
 And great fleets crushed upon a viewless shore,  
 Of maidens, singing wild, sweet song that lave  
 Their limbs in foam, they sang, while on the vessel  
 drave.

## XI.

But Siegfried inly mused on her who first  
 Woke the deep echoes from his silent soul,  
 His quest, his waiting, and his year-long thirst  
 For sight of her, on that first look he stole  
 That Whitsun morn, when from the brilliant shoal  
 Of squire and dame she shone and smiled to him ;  
 Him seemed once more he saw the gay lists roll,  
 When Chriemhild thanked him and the sky waxed  
 dim,  
 And he his service vowed to her of life and limb.

## XII.

Him seemed the monsters of the deep grew mild  
 When he of Chriemhild mused ; her loveliness  
 The sea of storm, the night of dark, beguiled ;  
 Often he deemed the sheen of her bright tress  
 Illumed the wave beneath the keel's impress,  
 When through the night they sped on billowed fire ;  
 The sparkling stars seemed jewels on her dress,  
 Her voice sang in the south wind's murmurous lyre,  
 Her breath embalmed sweet airs that fairy isles  
 suspire.

## XIII.

And when the twelfth sun leapt from Orient cave,  
 They sailed upon a sea of rosy fire,  
 Beholding, doubled in the burning wave,  
 A vast and glittering pile, with many a spire  
 Of marble emerald green in soaring gyre,  
 The embattled walls linked round by towers  
 fourscore ;  
 So fair a pile might Orpheus' golden lyre  
 In music's passion heave from magic shore,  
 So fair a pile man's art had never raised before.

## XIV.

To Gunther, gliding from the heavy dark  
 Before the dawn, these things a vision seem ;  
 And when the rose-light deepened on the bark,  
 Till rigging, spar, and sail in crimson gleam  
 Were steeped, " My brother, what a wondrous  
 dream  
 Is this ! " he cried. To whom the prince, " These  
 things  
 Are tangible and true, not as you deem ;  
 For this is Isenstein, fair home of kings,  
 That on the still wave broods, like bird with folded  
 wings. "

## XV.

Then the light strengthened and the wanderers  
 gazed  
 On clear-cut pinnacle and tower tall ;

But Siegfried this brave show no whit amazed,  
 And, inly smiling, as they marvelled all,  
 He showed the vast sweep of the outer wall,  
 The cunning workmanship of roof and spire,  
 The bastions' strength, the spacious inmost hall,  
 The palaces, aglow with emerald fire,  
 The carven splendours wrought to still some god's  
 desire.

## XVI.

They gazed like dreamers bound in magic spell,  
 With hands uplift towards the aërial blaze,  
 While deeper glories on the towers fell  
 And bright sun swept away the purple haze ;  
 And now they traced the turrets' wildering maze  
 And marked the vast hall in the central fold,  
 Now in the paling of the sun's new rays  
 The sea of crimson fire was turned to gold,  
 Within whose molten wave the imaged towers were  
 rolled.

## XVII.

From a high oriel, opening on the sea,  
 Fair ladies glanced through narrow lattice pane,  
 And Gunther marked one, gazing loftily,  
 The fairest and the tallest of the train ;  
 Her robe the swan's plume mocked, of silken grain  
 So purely white, her neck, like that of swan,  
 Arched proudly, beauty-conscious, did she strain  
 To see the advancing bark ; then waxed she wan,  
 Beholding it, and asked, " Whence comes that  
 bright-faced man ? "

## XVIII.

And Gunther asked of Siegfried, "Who is she,  
That lofty lady in the snowy stole?"

And the world-wandered prince, scanned curiously  
By Hagen, said, "Brunhild, who makes such dole  
For heroes." Then King Gunther's inmost soul  
Rejoiced. And now their keel screamed up the  
strand,

The windless sail flapped idly from the pole,  
With Gunther's steed Prince Siegfried leapt to  
land,

And there as vassal stood, the stirrup in his hand.

## XIX.

Now whom she asked, to Queen Brunhild replied,

"Lady, I know him not, a hero's mould  
Is his; though he as vassal stands beside  
A man of lesser thews, helm-bound with gold,  
The bright-faced man a greater chief I hold,  
Such majesty is on his lucid brow,  
Such grace and dignity his form enfold;  
It ill-befits that kingly head to bow  
To mortal man; some prince is he, disguised by vow.

## XX.

"Two warriors stand beside them, richly clad,  
Their arms are wondrous rich and all their gear,  
The younger hero hath a visage glad,  
Lightly he sits his steed and holds his spear;

Methinks the fourth was never touched by fear,  
How swiftly run his glances to and fro!

A mighty man, dark-browed, and waxing sere  
Of life ; Heaven send me not his like as foe !”  
So spake he, while the queen glanced, troubled-  
flushed, below.

## XXI.

Long, long she gazed on Hagen. “As a friend  
That dark-browed man were worth a thousand  
more,”

She mused, then bade her men the guests attend.  
Silk stuff and gold wrought tissue, maidens bore  
From cedarn presses to the queen, with store  
Of gems from stout oak coffers bound in steel ;  
A kingdom’s wealth upon her breast she wore,  
And round her waist the girdle that should seal  
The doom of Gunther’s race and Siegfried’s earthly  
weal.

## XXII.

Thus, in attire that flashed like many suns  
But richlier still arrayed in beauty’s light,  
The strong queen came below. Around her runs  
A quick-hushed murmur, for, so bravely dight  
Is Brunhild rarely in her people’s sight ;  
With regal mien she paced the pillared hall  
To greet the sea-borne guests ; her princely height,  
Her beauty’s splendour and her strength appal  
The wanderers, till their looks, all dazzled, down-  
wards fall.

## XXIII.

But Siegfried unabashed the war-maid's eye  
 Encountered, and, advancing, her addressed ;  
 Then she, "Who may these warriors be? and why,  
 Lord Siegfried, come they?" Then the prince,  
 her hest

Obeying, smiled, and briefly said, "To test  
 His sword comes Gunther, and your hand to win ;  
 He is a king and I his man; the best  
 Of all his heroes, near to him of kin,  
 Is Hagen, Dankwart next. When shall the fight  
 begin?"

## XXIV.

As in a summer wood the stately trees  
 Stand silently in golden glamour bound,  
 But, at the wakening of a little breeze,  
 Their leaves lift and a whisper circles round  
 From tree to tree, so went a gentle sound  
 Of laughter round the queen from maid to maid  
 Grouped near her. Then Brunhilda, "On the  
 ground  
 Where I shall fight, the bleaching bones are laid  
 Of many a warrior strong with shattered casque  
 and blade.

## XXV.

"Methinks the prowess of the Dragon-slayer  
 Himself were hardly tried in single fight  
 With me ! Let him betake himself to prayer  
 And look his farewell on the blessèd light

Who dares assail my never-conquered might,  
For that bold man must win or death or me.

Lord Siegfried, warn your master, lest the bite  
Of fanged remorse your heart tear endlessly,  
Well know you what to war with maiden strength  
may be."

## XXVI.

Then angry lightning shot from Siegfried's eye,  
Whereat the strong queen trembled and her hue  
Waxed fainter ; but the prince made calm reply  
Sweet-voiced. "King Gunther knows the forfeit due  
To vanquished knight ; the fleshless bones that  
strew

The plain affright him not. Say, fairest queen,  
When shall the fight begin, that we may view  
As noble combat as the world hath seen ?"  
Then Gunther spake, whom Brunhild scanned with  
scornful mien.

## XXVII.

So for the strife at once the swan-necked maid  
Gave order, and to arm herself withdrew.  
King Gunther took his spear, his limbs arrayed  
In armour, girt his sword of temper true ;  
Siegfried the mystic robe of sightless hue  
Threw on, and Balmung, his renownèd brand,  
Unseen beneath his veil of darkness drew ;  
Then, on a space of seaward-fronting land,  
Outside the emerald walls the warriors took their  
stand.

## XXVII.

How glorious the martial maid appeared  
 In helméd splendour, when the appointed ground  
 Impatiently she trod. Even Hagen feared  
 For Gunther, when her limbs in armour bound  
 He saw, and marked the charmed hair floating  
 round  
 Her supple form, and marked the cool disdain  
 That shaped her firm lip's curve and mute speech  
 found  
 In her far-flashing eye, the lovely bane  
 Of many a stalwart knight stretched stiff along the  
 plain.

## XXIX.

But deeper waxed his dread when three tall men  
 A spear three-edged, long-hafted, staggering bore;  
 This Brunhild caught and lightly poised, as when  
 Some careful housewife seeks her garnered store  
 And shakes an unthreshed stalk of barley hoar;  
 In wrath he slipped and haste to Gunther's side  
 And muttered, "Let us leave this cursed shore;  
 This is the Devil's wife. If we abide  
 We are dead men." To whom the king, "All  
 knightly pride

## XXX.

"Were put to shame if we this strife refused."  
 Then Hagen grasped his sword and swore to sell  
 Their lives at dearest. And the young king mused  
 In terror of the prize so fair and fell,



And thought how bards his timeless death would  
tell

In after years—a king by woman's might

Undone. But Siegfried, hid by mystic spell,  
Drew near and whispered, "All the acts of fight  
Seem thou to make while I do battle out of sight."

XXXI.

Then Gunther viewed the maid with lightened cheer  
And smiled when sweating men a huge shield  
brought,

A mighty shield to match the mighty spear,

Full three spans thick, of gold and iron wrought;  
The princess lightly in her white hand caught  
The massy shield, and, with a pard-like bound,

Leapt face to face with Gunther; then she sought  
Her aim and launched the spear. With rushing  
sound

It split the air and smote a thousand sparkles round

XXXII.

From the well-balanced shield and cleft it through,

That Siegfried staggered; but he stood again,  
Then from his mighty hand the king's spear flew,  
While Gunther well-nigh swooned from the fierce  
strain

Upon his hand; it smote the shield amain  
That fire sprang like a fountain from the gold  
And the strong queen reeled o'er the heaving plain

To earth, and in the dust her tresses rolled,  
Loud clanged the massive shield, shot from her  
palsied hold.

## XXXIII.

Up leapt the warrior maid with crimsoned brow  
And flaming glance, and scornfully she spake,  
"Receive my thanks, Knight Gunther, for the  
blow !"

Then twelve stout men in cords that well-nigh  
brake

A stone brought, which the mountain elves to  
make

A thousand years had sweat. This Brunhild heft  
With ease, as matrons heave a baken cake  
And turn it on the coals with touches deft,  
Then hurled it, that it hissed as eddying airs it cleft ;

## XXXIV.

And after it so many ells she sprang

It seemed to draw her in its rapid train,  
Her flowing hair flashed and her armour rang  
As she alighted far upon the plain ;

But the stone's falling all eyes sought in vain,  
So far it was. Then Siegfried found the stone  
And tossed it, like a fruit that long hath lain  
Grass-hid, and launched it ; but it seemed alone  
From Gunther's far-flung hand the massive rock  
was thrown.

## XXXV.

Yet Siegfried heaved it ; far above the queen  
 And far beyond in dizzy curve it flew ;  
 And Gunther, caught by Siegfried's arm unseen,  
 With mighty spring, as if a load-stone drew  
 Him after, flashed against the arching blue,  
 And lighted far beyond the great stone's cast.

This Brunhild saw, and waxen wan she grew  
 And marvelled. Then rose voices like a blast  
 In sudden storm at sea when snaps the sail-bent  
 mast.

## XXXVI.

For never yet so strong and far a spring  
 In sight of man by woman-born was made ;  
 Men closed around the spot in narrowing ring,  
 Applauding, mindless of the heavy shade  
 Upon the fair queen's brow. Silent she stayed  
 Afar, most like a lovely statue raised  
 By art of man, with gold and steel inlaid,  
 In some great city square, where joy-fires blazed,  
 Bells clashed, men thronged, but she on all unheed-  
 ing gazed.

## XXXVII.

Now Hagen marked the spring, and every hair  
 Upon his flesh in bristling awe upreared.  
 Anon he asked himself in what fell snare  
 Of devilry he with his prince had steered ;  
 And while he mused, the Niblung prince appeared  
 In his own form, unclothed of magic vest,

And sadly asked, as he some hindrance feared,  
 "Fair queen, when shall the fight begin?" Then  
 pressed  
 The vanquished maid in shame her white hands to  
 her breast.

## XXXVIII.

"Come hither, noble knights and warriors all ;  
 Come hither, every man of mine," she cried,  
 "The fight is lost and won ; King Gunther call  
 Your lord henceforth." And all the crowd replied  
 With shouts. Then Gunther, flushed with joy and  
 pride,  
 Drew near, and, with a mute betrothal kiss,  
 Encircled with his arms the glorious bride ;  
 Then smiled the queen as nothing were amiss,  
 And in full-voiced acclaim thundered the people's  
 bliss.

## XXXIX.

Then the Burgundians of home-going spake,  
 But Brunhild : "Where are all King Gunther's men  
 And ships, that he may fitly homeward take  
 His hardly-conquered queen?" Embarrassed then  
 Was Gunther, but the Niblung, swift of ken  
 And speech, replied : "The winds and stormy  
 waves  
 Delay our hosts no longer than till when  
 Day's king a third time in the ocean laves,  
 And, risen on new-yoked car, the sea with gold  
 flake paves."

## XL.

So once more in his robe of mystery veiled  
 Aboard the anchored boat the Niblung leapt ;  
 And there the people saw, and, seeing, paled,  
 The ship from all her moorings suddenly swept ;  
 Then marked they how the sails in silence crept  
 About her masts, how, like a living thing,  
 Unsteered, unoaded, by foot of man unstept,  
 She lifted in the breeze her snowy wing  
 And fled afar, till lost in evening's purple ring.

## XLI.

Now Siegfried through the night in darkness flew  
 And dawn, and gained the dim and distant land  
 Of Nifheim ; then his magic sail he drew  
 Close in, and silent trod the soundless strand.  
 Nibelungs and dwarfs uprose at his command,  
 An army mustered and a gallant fleet ;  
 The swart dwarfs drew across the furrowed sand  
 Rich treasure from the hoard—gold bracelets, meet  
 For beauty's arm, and gems whose hearts in fire-  
 dew beat,

## XLII.

Rings with pure pearl and quivering diamond set,  
 Rich rubies darkly bright, celestial gleam  
 Of sapphires, stuffs where golden broidery met  
 So thick on shining silk that not the beam

Of sun in dark rooms hath so dense a stream  
 Of lustrous motes ; these from the war-won store  
 The Dragon-slayer chose ; then through the cream  
 Of churning surf that edged the mystic shore  
 The vessels ploughed, and straight to Isenland they  
 bore.

## XXLIII.

And, when the second dawning scattered pearl  
 And gold upon the blue sea's heaving floor,  
 They saw the night-mist break in filmy curl  
 From the green-gleaming towers upon the shore ;  
 Then Siegfried drew the coil of darkness o'er  
 His kingly brow and lightly leapt to land ;  
 First to the expectant queen tidings he bore  
 Of Gunther's fleet at anchor by the strand  
 And spoke of gifts and men, by Brunhild straitly  
 scanned.

## XLIV.

And when at last the richly-dowered bride  
 Weighed anchor, all her fleet was girdled round  
 By Niblung ships, gold-laden ; thus her pride  
 Was amply fed. Yet many a sigh profound  
 Broke from the royal maiden's bosom, bound  
 No more in steel but silk ; and oft alone  
 She sat and watched gay living things that wound  
 Through lucent waves, or saw the purple zone  
 Of heaven alight with stars like flowers on May-  
 meads blown.

## XLV.

Now Chriemhild, safe at home in quiet bower,  
 Of those far-wandering warriors musèd oft,  
 And oft in secret from her kingly tower

She gazed on glooming wood and bloom-starred  
 croft,

Adown the broad Rhine, till in mazes soft  
 Of azure air he slipped; at morn she gazed,

While earth slept and one waning star aloft  
 Her lamp still swung, and when the pale moon  
 raised

Her pearly throne at eve and hill-tops rose-red  
 blazed.

## XLVI.

Deeply she mused of perils on the seas

By storm, by night, strange beasts and magic  
 things

That cheat the mariner, chilly climes that freeze

His breath, of dreadful fish with scaly wings,

And torrid suns whose rays are serpent stings;

Often in silence she for Siegfried prayed

And Gunther; often with the youthful kings,

Her brothers, spake she of the glorious maid,

So dreadful though so fair, and of the scanty aid

## XLVII.

The king had taken. Much the brothers feared

For Gunther; only Uta, undismayed

Of Siegfried's skill and strength spoke and his  
weird

Unearthly armour, and she held his aid  
Sufficient; so the gentle princess stayed  
Her hope upon this faith. Once, ere the morn,  
Out-gazing on the dim earth wrapped in shade,  
She heard the lark up-spring from bending corn  
In music, and afar, upon the dark wave borne,

## XLVIII.

In the gray dawning saw a snowy sail  
Swift-speeding; then her heart beat; then before  
The first rose reddened in the heaven pale,  
The white wings folded by the unsunned shore  
And she beheld the Dragon-slayer moor  
His boat; then straight her comely limbs she laid  
Again upon her couch. The Niblung bore  
Good tidings. So to greet the royal maid  
They stirred and bower and hall in garlands gay  
arrayed.

## XLIX.

The beacons flamed, the vassals dwelling round  
Sped to the sign, hot-spur, with foamy rein;  
And all upon the river-fronting ground  
Stood ordered fair to greet the bridal train,  
Bending, as bends a field of ripening grain  
By soft airs touched, before that glorious bride  
And groom. Then music wrought the tangled  
skein



Of blisses manifold to one. Great pride  
 Moved Gunther, floating calm on honour's fullest  
 tide.

## L.

And ere that sun long time had passed the  
 noon,

King Gunther guerdoned for his timely aid  
 Prince Siegfried, eager for the promised boon,  
 And in the dreadless hero's arms he laid  
 The peerless-beautiful, the princely maid.

This, solemnly before the shining sun,

In sight of all the subject lords, arrayed  
 In state at Worms, with noble speech was done ;  
 There the first kiss, the kiss of troth, so strangely  
 won,

## LI.

Was given ; nor recked they in the trembling  
 bliss

Of blended breath and meeting souls on lips  
 Still virgin, of a last, an anguished kiss,  
 Nor of warm hearts struck down in quick eclipse  
 Of death, nor of the fiercely-stinging whips  
 Of vengeance, nor of anything that harms ;

And, as at morn the roselight softly tips  
 The hill-top, then unfolds the valley's charms,  
 Slowly the princess flushed, close-clasped in happy  
 arms.

## LII.

Then from the courtly host a shout arose  
 Like surges when the storm-blasts break their  
 lair ;  
 For never nobler, loftier hero chose  
 Lady of lovelier face, or soul more fair,  
 And the warm cordial love the people bare  
 Her grace and courtesy of years had earned ;  
 Even the grim Hagen wore a gentler air  
 When on the twain his blazing glances burned,  
 But Brunhild from the sight with wrathful visage  
 turned.

## LIII.

The war-maid turned, and in her lustrous eyes  
 Tears rose and trembled down her fair cheek's  
 bloom ;  
 This Gunther marked with conscience - stung  
 surprise,  
 And bent, as shame strove in his soul's strait  
 room  
 With fear, till on her drooped his helmet-plume,  
 Asking what sorrow touched his fairest queen.  
 " I weep," she cried, " thy sister's lowly doom,  
 That thou shouldst give her to a man so mean,  
 Thy vassal, and her fate of all the world be seen !"

LAY THE FOURTH

THE FATAL GIFTS



*PRELUDE*

**Marriage**

WHEN God man's lot on earth would chiefly  
    bless,

    He bade him be, not one alone, but twain ;  
To one most power, to one most loveliness,  
    Of soul and body, gave he, and with chain,

Silk-soft but strong as adamant, he bound  
    Their lives. Thus yearnings in man's spirit rise  
To link his strength with sweetness, and to sound  
    The gentler soul that laughs from beauty's eyes

And all the rough-hewn edges of his might  
    To shape in polished shafts to firmly bear  
The grace of arch and turret, springing light  
    Into the vast of heaven's azure air.

Nor vainly yearns he ; even as sunbeams, hidden  
    Long æons past in buried groves of fern,  
At touch of flame, from chill and darkness bidden,  
    In flame the sun's long-cherished rays return,

Love wakes at touch of love ; the self-same strain  
That strength to sweetness draws for perfectness,  
Draws sweetness in the coil of power's chain ;  
So lightning's opposite fires together press

For calm and safety ; fires that, held asunder,  
Deal death and ruin in their ceaseless yearning,  
Each calling each with roar of rolling thunder,  
Each flashing unto each, all barriers spurning.

Love wedded is a home in life's bleak waste,  
An ingle-nook of rest from care and toil,  
Where human souls in holy calm are braced,  
Refreshed, and held apart from earthly soil.

Thrice happy he in reverence due who holds  
These mysteries ! upon his heaven-touched eyes,  
Bright, through the clinging mist that earth enfolds,  
Visions of heavenly espousals rise.

*LAY THE FOURTH***The fatal Gifts**

## I.

'T WAS harvest time ; upon the sunny plain  
The corn bent heavy to the reaper's hand,  
Fruits, globed in russet, gold and purple stain,  
Through dark leaves glowed ; strong arms by  
August tanned  
The cut sheaves caught and bound in straw-twist  
band ;  
The blood rose warmer through the clustered vine ;  
Voices of mirth and labour filled the land  
Day long and in the warm moon's mellow shine ;  
Calmly by crag and croft flowed on the emerald  
Rhine.

## II.

And while the tiller gathered in his store  
From teeming earth, the war-worn Dragon-slayer  
The fruit of valour reaped. The river-shore  
At Worms was thronged by motley crowds, the air  
By mirth and music broken ; passing fair  
The flower-dight city smiled, with arras quaint,  
Pageant and masque, and armour bright and rare ;

In the dim minster, rich with carven saint  
And pictured angel calm, heaven's breath with  
sweet was faint.

## III.

For now at last the bridal rites were done  
That Chriemhild to her long-tried lover gave,  
And wed King Gunther to the lady won  
By occult power, the spoil of valour, brave  
As beautiful. Until the dumb, dark grave,  
That swallows all, and stills in dawnless night  
Gay heart and tuneful tongue, crowned king and  
knave,  
Should yawn for him, each warrior troth did  
plight  
To either lady ; thence was joyaunce and delight.

## IV.

Nor did the thought that he had subtly won  
The charmèd maiden Siegfried's soul oppress,  
Nor any slight misgiving cloud the sun  
That touched the zenith of his happiness ;  
And, for he would all people in the stress  
Of his deep joy might share, largesse he gave  
And scattered gold like seed, as through the press  
He passed ; men's voices swelled a thunder-wave,  
Like roar of crashing seas that war in winding  
cave.



## V.

How beauteous was the bridal, homeward going,  
How glowed the city in the torch-light glare ;  
It seemed some shining sun, all overflowing  
With glory, poured his light till he was bare  
Of beams. The princely brides, apparelled fair,  
With jewelled broidery that mocked the stars,  
In beauty shone, but Chriemhild past compare ;  
Her joy was meek as when at last unbars  
Heaven's portal high to soul sore spent in sin's wild  
wars.

## VI.

Gaily before the bright and festal board  
In hall the newly-wedded warriors sate,  
Each lovely bride beside her blissful lord  
Blushed flower-like—how could agony or hate  
Those radiant features mar, those eyes, elate  
With softest fire? Swiftly the evening fled  
On wings of joy ; with minstrel's lay of fate,  
Of love and lofty deeds, with airy tread  
Of dancer, festal cup, the hours too swiftly sped.

## VII.

Night darkened, deepened ; sounds of grief and  
mirth  
She hushed to peace within her balmy breast ;  
Beneath her fragrant wing the wearied earth  
Lay folded soft in deep and dreamy rest,

No more in lighted hall the jewelled vest  
 Of reveller flashed or waved the dancer's plume,  
 The castle towers in dewy dark were dressed,  
 Sleep fed the thews of strength and beauty's  
 bloom,  
 While strange, bright-vestured dreams swept  
 through night's caverned gloom.

## VIII.

Star after star his squadroned host arrayed  
 Till every shining, silent watch was sped ;  
 Fair flower-cups filled with dew, and then o'er-  
 weighed  
 With bliss, each blossom bowed her dainty head ;  
 Gray glimmered in the east, where stars fell dead,  
 Day's pallid heralds ; then, in primrose skies  
 Rose sweet Aurora, fresh from Tithon's bed,  
 All blushes ; in the light of her fair eyes,  
 Earth, ocean, air, and sky flushed red with joyed  
 surprise.

## IX.

Men woke, the sons of sorrow or of sin,  
 The sceptred king, the babe a few days born ;  
 Youths rose to labour, maids to toil and spin ;  
 Rich men and beggars, widows newly lorn  
 And brides of yester-eve, that rose-breathed morn  
 From sleep's soft folding drew with tender touch,  
 And they arose to rapture or to scorn ;

Pale men awoke, just snatched from death's fell  
clutch ;

Morn equal smiled on all, nor gave she one too  
much,

## X.

Or one too little. Ere her beamy car

Long way had climbed upon the sapphire road,  
The castle gates swung wide and guests from far

Poured in. The barbèd charger hotly trode

The lists ; long galleries with beauty glowed ;  
Crowds gathered, all in festal raiment dight ;

Fair feasts were spread, red wine as water flowed,  
Warm sunlight danced on plume and armour  
bright,

Touched motley, purple vair, and cloth of silver  
white.

## XI.

Into the hall to greet the newly wed

Flocked princes and great lords, the brother  
kings,

Gernot and Giselher, and she who read

The future's secret lore, Queen Uta. Things

Of price, arms richly wrought and jewelled rings,  
They gave the brides ; Chriemhild the golden  
hoard

Of Niblung, won in early wanderings  
From the fire-breathing dragon by his sword,  
Received as morning gift from her heroic lord.

## XII.

But who may paint the light of perfect gladness  
Upon that lady's pure and princely brow,  
The lofty peace, untouched by shade of sadness,  
The modest tenderness, that until now  
Had slumbered? For at last she dared avow  
Her glory in that peerless prince of men ;  
With tears she thanked him, and she marvelled  
how  
So great a knight was hers ; and not till then  
Did all life's meaning flash on Siegfried's raptured  
ken.

## XIII.

It was a joy to see that noble pair,  
So blissful and so beautiful of mien,  
Yet few could mark their outward grace, so rare  
And clear a medium to the souls serene  
And fair within, appeared their beauty's sheen ;  
It seemed our dark and cumbrous veil of flesh,  
Like radiant ether pure, itself unseen,  
Disclosed them, unentangled by the mesh  
Of frail mortality, in them so stainless fresh.

## XIV.

But near them gloomed the other princely pair,  
Gunther and Brunhild. In the strong queen's eye  
Blazed haughty daring, and her lofty air  
No softening showed ; it seemed the marriage-tie

No meekness brought to her proud soul and high;  
Most like a ruler gazed she on her lord

And marked with scorn a cloud upon him lie,  
While he her eyes like some keen-piercing sword  
Avoided, yet with gifts he heaped the fair bride's  
board.

## XV.

And little lightened Gunther's brow of gloom  
When he was greeted on his marriage morn ;  
It seemed some veil from darkly shadowed doom  
Before his eyes by fateful hand was torn ;  
The down-struck glance that comes of dreaded  
scorn

Was his ; and to his friend ere day waxed old,  
To Siegfried, "Woe the hour that I was born !"  
He cried ; "No gentle bride of human mould  
Is mine, but devil's wife, let loose from Hell's black  
hold."

## XVI.

He told that, when the twain were left alone,  
Brunhild her lord by strength of arm o'ercame  
And helpless bound for pastime in her zone ;  
This with averted face he told, and shame  
His features fired with bitter, burning flame.  
But Siegfried bade him mend his cheer and he  
Would aid in cloak invisible, that blame  
Of weakness should not touch him ; wherefore free  
From care King Gunther passed that day right  
joyously.

## XVII.

But when again the pair alone were found,  
    Gunther his powers in sportive fight would try ;  
Brunhild with scorn consented ; he who bound  
    The other, would through life have mastery ;  
    Then strove the twain, and Siegfried, standing by  
Unseen, the strong queen pinioned fast ; then,  
    wrought  
    To fierce despair, she strove as she would die ;  
But Siegfried held and bound her. Thence he  
    brought  
Her girdle and her ring, of malice deeming nought.

## XVIII.

Of malice deemed the dreadless warrior nought  
    But mirthful aid for friendship's gentle sake ;  
He little recked the peril that is wrought  
    By foreign aid in marriage, or the snake  
    That through his well-meant friendliness should  
    break  
From deadly coil upon them. For his friend  
    All lawful things would Siegfried undertake,  
His dearest blood for him with gladness spend,  
And all his glorious gifts with joy to aid him lend.

## XIX.

—Ah, kingly Dragon-slayer, couldst thou not slay  
    Thy fault of sex, male arrogance, half scorn,  
Half tenderness, that makes it fair to play

With woman's rarer gifts as quips mirth-born  
In Nature's wanton mood, false plumage, worn  
By eagle-aping dove, that makes a lie  
To woman told a manly lip adorn,  
To cheat her, kindness, purest chivalry  
To male Procrustean whim her stretched, lopped  
soul to tie?—

## XX.

But woe the hour when he to Chriemhild told  
The thing with smiles, and woe the fatal hour  
When he the girdle gave and ring of gold  
To Chriemhild! Better were that princely flower  
Faded in bud before the deadly dower  
She took, with laughing lip she took, and breast  
Untouched by guile. The Norns with viewless  
power  
Thus wove the darksome woof when life was  
best;  
Thus cruel death oft comes in smiles and joyance  
drest.

## XXI.

So Gunther reaped the fruits another sowed,  
And swayed an empire by another won,  
With unapt hand he swayed; and Brunhild showed  
Strange gifts, and spoke strange speech of colour  
dun  
And cloudy, oft his meaning would out-run,

Often her lord with mystery perplexed,  
And oft she smiled strange, joyless smiles, as one  
By unstilled hungering for ever vexed ;  
To him some fair-limned scroll she seemed of  
mystic text.

## XXII.

But from that night her charmèd maiden might  
Took wing, and she her weapons cast aside ;  
No more the plumed helm throned above her  
bright  
And thoughtful eyes ; no more in martial pride  
She hurled the spear or cast the swift stone  
wide,  
No more her tender breast in iron bound ;  
With busy hand the distaff now she plied,  
About her radiant brow fair flowers she wound,  
And in all woman's arts and skills was perfect  
found.

## XXIII.

Now sped the bridals merrily, and first  
Was Siegfried, as of yore, in martial game.  
With Gunther oft he strove, and always worst  
Was Gunther, but in failing felt no shame ;  
Nor did prince Siegfried prize the bloodless fame  
Of tilting ground ; but much he loved to see  
His prowess set his lady's cheek aflame,  
And once he marked Brunhild, and saw that she  
Behind her wimple's fold was weeping silently.



## XXIV.

Why wept the fair queen? Who the complex strands  
Of woman's thought to certain source may trace?  
What clue contrived by lightest, deftest hands  
May find that labyrinthine hiding place?  
The bright tears dimmed the beauty of her face,  
Her soul the splendid jousts a burden found ;  
Unto her lord she said, "The evil case  
Of Chriemhild grieves me, to a vassal bound ;  
Alas ! in what sad coil hast thou thy sister wound !"

## XXV.

Then Gunther, flushing, "Siegfried is a king,  
And glorious hero tried in hard emprise,  
In after-time high bards his fame will sing,  
Undying light about his name will rise."  
And Brunhild, "Mystery around us lies ;  
Not as a king this man thy stirrup held ;  
Thou, lord of all this realm, in nobler wise  
Shouldst mate thy sister ; better were she celled  
In convent gloom than thus to lowly fate compelled !"

## XXVI.

And ever when they spoke of Siegfried's fame  
Or Chriemhild's beauty, waxed the fair queen's  
grief,  
And when she marked their eyes in holy flame  
Of love together burn, like autumn's leaf

Her rose-lip quivered, and her soul re-  
In scornful looks found; yet she spake them  
fair,

And Chriemhild sister called, and mourned their  
brief

Sojourn in Worms. But when beyond compare  
Chriemhild her hero praised, how changed the  
Valkyr's air !

## XXVII.

But Chriemhild nothing recked of wrath or pain

So pure a light of love about her lay ;

Each fleeting moment brought her deeper gain

Of joy, and Siegfried every dawning day

Made closer and of greater price ; thus gay

As never in life's rosy dawn was she ;

And, if her early dreams their pinions gray

Flapped through the chambers of her memory,

She mused with hope and joy Queen Uta's prophecy.

## XXVIII.

Queen Uta's prophecy, that such a cup

Of bliss, as never woman sipped before,

For her through warrior's love should sparkle up

To foaming brim and even overpour

In benediction. Then the wan queen's lore

With smiles she praised ; and Uta, what of woe

The dream foretold, to show her child forbore ;

Only she said at parting, "Should some blow  
Of evil hap thee smite—so brief is bliss below—

## XXIX.

"Think on thy mother and thy childhood's home  
And fly, hurt fledgling, to thine early nest."  
But Chriemhild smiled ; she deemed the transient  
foam,  
That crowns the cup from life's first vintage  
pressed  
Immortal ; thus, in perfect gladness dressed  
As in an armour, sorrow she defied ;  
And thus the festal hours with perfect zest  
Enjoyed, and at her worshipped lover's side  
Moved softly down the stream of joy's full-flowing  
tide.

## XXX.

Oh ! happy days, youth's golden, glorious prime,  
Oh ! dulcet chord of mutual love, that binds  
Discording elements to purest chime  
Of music ! Happy he who early finds  
That bliss, while glamour still young vision  
blinds,  
Thrice happy he ! though sorrow's heavy pall  
Him shadow, though chill blasts of blighting  
winds  
On all his blossomed hopes in fury fall,  
In memory still pure joys come trooping at his call.

## XXXI.

Joy is a blossom from immortal bowers,  
It cannot die, though oft it seem to fade,  
Though oft the glory of its Eden flowers,  
Pass from us, ere they long enough have stayed  
To glass their beauty in the eyes' still shade ;  
Once tasted, bliss is ours for evermore ;  
In lonely nights, when earth to sleep is laid,  
And pain hath clutched the sleeper's temples  
hoar,  
Past joys with amaranth crowned steal through  
thought's fast-sealed door.

## XXXII.

And oft the pilgrim on life's desert way,  
Forspent with travel, pauses for a space,  
All smitten by the noon-tide's piercing ray,  
The while his sun-dazed eyes a resting place  
Seek in the fairy fields of youthful grace,  
That lie so far behind ; and there he views  
Departed joy's young smiling angel-face ;  
He gazes long, he will not lightly lose  
That vision sweet arrayed in morn's aërial hues.

## XXXIII.

At last the bride-feast ended ; Sigelind's son  
His new-wed wife in state to Santen bore ;

To Santen, where the Rhine-waves slower run ;  
Where in great honour dwelt King Sigmund,  
hoar  
With years and full-ripe wisdom. Not before  
Had Sigmund seen so fair a bride and sweet ;  
And now was ended all their longing sore,  
All care and fear for Siegfried's weal ; complete  
Were now all earthly hopes ; and now to make him  
meet

## XXXIV.

For loftier life beyond the senses' bound  
Was Sigmund's only care ; he cast away  
His sceptre and his weary brow discrowned ;  
Into his son's strong hand his kingdom's sway  
He gave, and near him in an abbey gray  
Abode with Sigelind. Thus a double realm  
Chriemhild with Siegfried shared, and day by  
day  
Enwreathed him as the wifely vine her elm ;  
And with a firm bold hand he grasped his two-fold  
helm.

## XXXV.

In honour, peace, and bliss long time abode  
That gentle pair, with life's best treasure blest.  
Mild was their sway and just ; all things men  
sowed  
They reaped, nor dared the strong the weak  
molest,

King Siegfried every wrong with might redressed,  
And the far land of mystic Nifheim well

He ruled. And, ere a second time they pressed  
The ripened vintage or the red leaf fell,  
Chriemhild a son bore, fair as pink-lipped ocean  
shell.

LAY THE FIFTH

THE STRIFE OF THE SISTER QUEENS





V.

*PRELUDE*

**The Best Land\***

**T**ELL me the sweetest, fairest spot of earth,  
Tell me the land of every land most blest ;  
Lies it beyond the morning's rosy birth ?  
Lies it beyond the crimson-pillared west ?

Smiles it upon the broad earth's burning zone,  
Where chilling blasts of north wind never come ?  
Is it some fairy isle whose sweets are blown  
Far over sea by zephyrs soft and dumb ?

Is it some still, enchanted vale of rest,  
Deep in the heart of Alpine mountains old,  
Where sunny peaks their image in the breast,  
Liquid and still, of sapphire lakes behold ?

Is it some land of endless afternoon,  
Where dreamers eat the mystic Lotos-flower ?  
Is it the spot, beheld in magic swoon  
Or visioned trance, of Adam's primal bower ?

No ; 'tis the land, the land that gave us birth,  
No ; 'tis the blessed land where first we breathed,  
Where first we wept, where first unconscious mirth  
Smiles with the baby's tender dimples wreathed.

'Tis the sweet land our growing limbs that fed,  
The land that gave us thews and hearts of men,  
Where beauty first upon our soul was shed,  
Where Heaven opened first upon our ken.

That land whose features formed our spirits' mould,  
Whose soul to ours with earliest breath we drew,  
Where first we saw the seasons' pomp unfold,  
Saw morning's splendour, evening stars and dew.

Where human care our young souls fenced from pain,  
Where human love closed round us like a tower,  
Whose skies above us bent in sun or rain,  
On whose green sod we plucked life's earliest  
flower.

That land whose speech our earliest faltering prayer  
Bore up to Heaven and clothed our infant thought,  
Shaped the dim songs of childhood's twilight air,  
Love's earliest thrills to fit expression wrought.

That is the fairest, sweetest spot of earth,  
Fertile and fresh, or parched with burning drouth,  
Rich vale of beauty, craggy land of dearth,  
Bare northern peak, or rich and lustrous south.

That land the exile's heart with yearning fills,  
Hearing its tongue beneath unhomely skies,  
Where Nature's glory, throned on mighty hills,  
Fair smiling plains, or seas, around him lies.

England! a stronger yearning to thy shore  
Thy brave, world-wandering sons for ever calls  
Than any land's; the great sun's golden ore  
Unceasing on thy scattered children falls;

Yet is their England never aught than home,  
Though in far lands bloom children, brothers  
sleep,  
To that far island-speck upon the foam  
From fairest climes they turn with longings deep.

Sweet to the pilgrim, fresh from burning Ind,  
Rise thy pale cliffs above the azure sea;  
Sweet over thymy downs the moist, west wind  
Comes wafted, sweetly smiles the shadowed lea;

Sweet is the hoary steeple to his eyes;  
The straggling village, deep in garden bloom;  
Wild tangled hedge-bank, whence tall elms arise;  
Noon's chastened sunbeams, twilight's dewy  
gloom.

What memories on his eager spirit throng,  
What dim, strange thoughts from childhood's far  
abyss!

He sees what he has seen in dreams so long,  
He fears to wake lest he his joy should miss.

So deems the child of England, deeply blest  
To press once more her velvet, verdant sod,  
To lay his head upon her mighty breast,  
What time his spirit wings its way to God.

*LAY THE FIFTH***The Strife of the Sister Queens**

## I.

**B**RUNHILD, the bride of valour, won by might  
 Not mortal, dwelt at Worms beside her king,  
 Ten peaceful years ; a man-child, Siegfried hight,  
 She bore King Gunther. Time's unresting wing  
 Her beauty dimmed not, nor the ancient sting  
 Of life's young anguish dulled ; at evening oft  
 Or morn, in converse with her lord, one string  
 Of memory she waked with touches soft ;  
 This theme he shunned, as hawk, in circle poised  
 aloft,

## II.

Unwelcome quarry shuns, and, to the fist  
 Of patient trainer lured and loosed once more,  
 Again avoids ; yet Brunhild never missed  
 Her purpose ; of the pleasant days of yore  
 She spoke ; how Gunther first the towered shore  
 Of Isenland beheld, the glorious fight  
 That won her, and the noble fleet that bore  
 The spoil of arms to Worms ; the ring, the night  
 That lost it ; all the charm of memoried delight.

## III.

“That thou thy sister to thy vassal wed,  
To Siegfried, ever grieved me,” she would say,  
“Yet much I marvel at their pride; his head  
In homage he not bows, nor doth he pay  
Us tribute; summers ten have passed away  
Yet thou thy lawful due requirest not.”

Then Gunther, “In far lands he holdeth sway,  
'T were marvel did he seek this distant spot,  
Great cares and kingly toils are fallen to Siegfried's  
lot.”

## IV.

But in the end the woman's will prevailed;  
Gunther took counsel of his brothers twain,  
Gernot and Giselher, but subtly veiled  
The purpose of the queen. To clasp again  
Chriemhild and link afresh the holy chain  
Of blood and friendship that so straitly bound  
Them to the Dragon-slayer, Brunhild would fain  
Behold them; then fit messengers were found;  
Thus in the iris woof Norns threads of blackness  
wound.

## V.

Now, after journeying many a weary day,  
The messengers the dim and distant strand  
Of Niflheim reached; and welcome as the May  
In wintry climes, were men from Chriemhild's  
land

To Siegfried ; and they did their lord's command ;  
Said he would see his brother's face once more  
At the high feast the olden usage planned,  
What time the sun turned on the height and bore  
Back southward, filling barn and press with  
bounteous store.

## VI.

Then Siegfried's heart with honest gladness leapt,  
Not deeming aught of Brunhild's hidden scorn,  
Or Brunhild's hidden wrath, that never slept ;  
He joyed that Gunther all those years had worn  
So true a friendship, and, upon the morn  
When first his eyes the pure and princely grace  
Of Chriemhild saw, he mused, and pleasure born  
Of freshened memory held him for a space ;  
Then to the queen he told the thing with eager face.

## VII.

Then rosy dyes the queen's fair cheek suffuse  
At thought of seeing home and kin once more ;  
Her gentle eyes brimmed up with blissful dews  
At Brunhild's kindness ; memories of yore,  
Like odour of dried roses, floated o'er  
Her soul, and she her lord with urgency prayed  
To bear her to the Rhine's remembered shore ;  
Of peril and long absence, undismayed  
She heard, so they with joy all plans for travel made.

## VIII.

First to Dwarf Alberich Siegfried gave the helm  
Of Niblung's mystic land, with all its gold,  
To keep for him ; then, his paternal realm  
Of Santen, to a man of wisdom old  
But youthful strength, he gave in trust to hold ;  
Then many wains with noble gifts were piled,  
Arms, gems, and precious stuffs of heavy fold.  
Thus fared they forth, and Chriemhild's nine  
year's child,  
Gunther, beside her rode and on the warriors smiled.

## IX.

And near them came the agèd father king,  
Sigmund, with Sigelind, in a litter borne.  
The ever-circling year had passed the spring,  
Warm winds swept verdant seas of billowing corn,  
The rose's heart of splendour hid the thorn,  
In darkling woods the nightingale was mute ;  
But still the throstle charmed the awaking morn,  
And still at eve was heard the blackbird's flute,  
Warmly on woodland banks lurked gold and crimson  
fruit :

## X.

And all day long the lark's sweet, soaring choir  
Through heaven's deeps were borne on waves of  
song ;  
Anon a voice in rapture would expire

And drop the minstrel ; so, shot from a throng  
 Of frosty stars, some bright orb sweeps along  
 The blue and falls ; the honey-scented breeze  
 Green meadows skimmed, where mowers, brown  
 and strong,  
 Long, blooming swathes swept down with measured  
 ease ;  
 The woodbine's delicate horn poured sweets beneath  
 green trees ;

## XI.

Night's balmy veil scarce dusk'd the dreaming  
 world,  
 The dead day smiled till dawn in heavens pale,  
 The short, smooth sward with scanty dew was  
 pearled,  
 Scarce had the north star seen the secret dale  
 Ere the young morning made a silvery trail  
 Along the east ; at bright and breathless noon  
 A planted spear no shadow made, a sail  
 One thin line cast beneath it ; all aswoon  
 With rapture, life seemed, lulled by hidden brook's  
 low croon.

## XII.

By land and sea, by day and night, they fared  
 All in the summer's blue and balmy prime ;  
 Strange towns they saw, from towers strange  
 faces glared,  
 Anon they marked white summits heavenward  
 climb,



Anon on sunny slopes balm-breathing thyme  
Their steeds trod ; then some shadowy woodland  
dell

They entered, grateful ; now the gentle chime  
They heard afar of consecrated bell,  
And now from hill-top caught far ocean's azure  
swell.

## XIII.

So in the glowing heart of glorious June,  
Home-lands they reached and unforgotten meads,  
Where spinners sang at cottage doors the tune  
That Chriemhild hushed her child with ; even  
the weeds

These wore, recalled old times and kindly deeds  
In childhood ; then she told her eager son,  
“This road straight onward through the city  
leads,

And yonder Rhine's fair shining waters run,  
And yonder rise the towers where me thy father  
won.”

## XIV.

But ere they reached the city's bastioned gate,  
They marked afar a host in splendour gleam  
Around the brother kings ; these seeing them,  
straight

King Gunther spurred ahead. And now a  
dream

To Chriemhild all the vanished ten years seem ;  
 Once more she sees her kinsmen face to face,  
 Once more her father's towers, the child-loved  
 stream  
 Of Rhine ; and all the sweet remembered grace  
 Of maiden days came back and held her for a space.

## XV.

Then the kings, 'lighted to the flower-strewn  
 ground,  
 The friend of blissful youth with joy received,  
 And Siegfried's gold-haired son King Gunther  
 wound  
 In loving arms and high in air upheaved ;  
 All spoke, but none replied, and sighs relieved  
 The over-joy. And each in his degree,  
 The kingly parents, and the guards gold-greaved  
 From Niflheim, the kings welcomed cordially ;  
 Then through the city passed the goodly company.

## XVI.

The city, all abloom with fresh-cut flowers,  
 And flower-like faces, crowning gallery  
 And casement ; there blank walls and glooming  
 towers  
 Shone rich with golden-folded tapestry.  
 Liege citizens of high and low degree  
 The humming streets with cheerful faces lined,  
 And goodly knights and ladies fair to see,

Their heads in gracious reverence inclined  
From carven balconies with silks and garlands  
twined.

## XVII.

Like to the light of myriad gleaming stars  
In winter midnight, shone the liquid eyes  
Of all those ladies ; like faint-rumoured wars  
From distant lands, like hidden seas, that rise  
And fall unseen in full-toned symphonies  
Beneath tall cliffs, arose the deep strong hum  
Of men's hushed voices ; now it broke to cries  
And fell ; and now the strangers nearer come,  
And now the Niblung's child with awed delight is  
dumb.

## XVIII.

Here maidens showered blossoms, children wept  
To see the hero, who the dragon slew,  
And the strange glittering guards, who proudly  
swept  
Along with all the treasure. Chriemhild threw  
Rich largesse, smiling ; many a face she knew ;  
Brides newly pledged, who erst as children  
played  
At her betrothal ; long-limbed lads, who drew  
Their earliest breath ; a matron, then a maid  
Betrothed, whom now a band of lusty sons  
obeyed.

## XIX.

At last they paused before the hoary towers  
Of Chriemhild's early home beside the Rhine,  
There with her dames, a rose among bright flowers,  
Stood Brunhild ; sworded men in ordered line  
A quivering steelflash made, and many a mine  
Had yawned to deck the throng with lustre rare ;  
Siegfried, Brunhilda's child of summers nine,  
Smiled there with roguish eyes and sunny hair  
By Uta ; blunted arms the little warrior bare.

## XX.

Down from her palfrey Chriemhild lighted swift,  
Long in her arms the widowed queen she pressed  
With happy tears ; anon she stooped to lift  
Brunhild's young warrior to her heart and blessed  
The lad, while Uta Siegfried's son caressed ;  
Thus made they very joyous cheer, and bliss  
Grew on them ; thus no boding stirred the breast  
Of Chriemhild, meeting Brunhild's gentle kiss,  
Nor felt she on her lips the traitor's burning hiss.

## XXI.

But Uta marked with awe the lifting veil  
Of future things ; upon her queenly child,  
On Chriemhild, wistfully she gazed, and, pale  
With present joy and coming woe, she smiled.

Gunther, with restless foot and glances wild,  
Paced swiftly, like a boy in forest hoar  
At eve entangled and by tales beguiled  
Of dim enchantment ; thus sweet things of yore  
That Siegfried brought to mind in secret dread he  
bore.

## XXII.

But this the Niblung marked not, full of joy  
As when he won his loved and lovely dream ;  
Life's fairy gold, unmingled with alloy,  
Before him flashed its soft, alluring beam ;  
Deeply he drank the fair, full-flowing stream  
Of youth's far-dreamed and manhood's actual bliss,  
And with his friend he touched the gracious theme  
Of young enthusiasms, plans of his  
For good of man, fulfilled ; but Gunther heard amiss.

## XXIII.

For all his thought was set on Brunhild's words,  
Lest she some spark of unextinguished hate  
Might fire, and from her lips him seemed that  
swords  
Leapt piercing, and this fear a mountain weight  
Pressed on him. Oft he saw, when night grew late  
And sleep weighed heavy on his out-watched eyes,  
Dread visions stalk along with tragic gait,  
And, dreaming, clutched his sword, dreaming,  
with cries  
Awoke to see the morn from rosy mist-folds rise.

## XXIV.

But, as the days passed peaceful, quiet grew  
    Upon him, and these things, like deeds of old  
By minstrel sung, waxed faint and dim of hue,  
    And Gunther's spirit took its ancient hold  
Of life. Afar on crest of hill, or wold,  
High-lying, flamed the mystic summer fires,  
    The night the sun his chariot turned and rolled  
Slant southward ; cressets lit the city spires ;  
Men feasted, as of old, their god-descended sires

## XXV.

Had feasted, ere the gentle Christian lore  
    Tamed all the world ; but softer were the rites  
They practised now than in the pagan yore ;  
    The city ways were full of wondrous sights,  
Of cunning pageantries and quaint delights ;  
Before the kings high jousts of arms were held,  
    Fair dames of noble blood contending knights  
With smiles and spirit-kindling looks beheld ;  
Such gorgeous revelry oft pleased the dim, rich eld.

## XXVI.

But, amid all the feasting, darkly grew  
    The web of fear. Though Brunhild's wrath and  
    scorn  
A loving semblance wore to outward view,  
    Deep in her breast she hid the fretting thorn,

And oft to Chriemhild spoke she of the morn  
When Gunther brought her to the Rhineland  
shore,

And all the pleasant time when first was born  
Their friendship, of the marriage feast, the store  
Of bliss that heaped their lot with blessings  
brimming o'er.

## XXVII.

It chanced one day in hall the fair queens span,  
Watching hard by their sturdy lads at play ;  
When, roused from thought, said Chriemhild—

“Such a man

Is mine, methinks by right the kingly sway  
Of many lands were his, him might obey  
Great kings with honour ; how so great a one  
Is mine, I know not.” Then Brunhild no way  
To breathe her anger found ; what she had spun  
She spoiled ; from tight-clenched hands she made  
the red blood run.

## XXVIII.

This Chriemhild marked not in her deep content,  
But, glancing through the open lattice-bars,  
She saw the kings as they a-hawking went  
And said, “A brilliant moon among pale stars  
Siegfried with other heroes rides ; great wars  
And valorous deeds have never marred the grace  
Of youth upon him.” Then the ancient scars

Of hate burst open ; all her beauteous face  
 By fury changed, her deep breaths battling with  
 the lace

XXIX.

That bound her bosom, Brunhild fiercely cried,  
 "Wide lands are Gunther's. He is greater far  
 Than Siegfried—much I marvel at thy pride,  
 Thou vassal's wife ! When Gunther came to war  
 For me, Siegfried his vassal stood. A star,  
 A little falling star beneath the moon,  
 Is he by Gunther !"—"Let us leave to mar  
 Our love by words soon said but not so soon  
 Forgot," Chriemhild replied, wan-hued as in a  
 swoon ;

XXX.

"Yet to no vassal me my brothers wed,  
 Of other things, dear sister, let us tell."  
 Thus Siegfried's gentle wife would fain have led  
 The angered queen to sweeter thoughts and well  
 Have ended ; but the fierce, tempestuous swell  
 Of passion in the Valkyr not so soon  
 Might she subdue ; as light, in hollow cell  
 Pent up, the surging ocean from the moon  
 With human hands restrain, or hold at highest noon

XXXI.

The sun's bright chargers from their downward path  
 To evening's glowing gates, as seek to hold  
 In check the torrent of Brunhilda's wrath,  
 That from her lips in burning passion rolled ;



“ I will not speak of aught till I have told  
Thy husband’s state ; he is, and aye shall be,  
Our vassal. Tribute he shall pay of gold  
And service ; such King Gunther, save for thee,  
Long since had claimed by arms ; our vassal still  
is he.”

## XXXII.

This Chriemhild heard with breathless, mute  
amaze  
And marvelled, was she of her wits bereaved,  
That haughty queen ? and in her azure eyes  
Some righteous anger shone, and sorrow heaved  
Her bosom as she said, “ Thou art deceived,  
Dear sister ; Siegfried is the mightiest man  
And noblest hero ever breath received ;  
A stripling, ere his manhood’s spring began,  
Such deeds he wrought as not in life’s full summer  
can

## XXXIII.

“ My brother. What he wrought will babes unborn  
In after-ages sing ; the realms he won  
Are greater far than Gunther’s ; treasures torn  
From awful powers are his ; no mother’s son  
Can match with him in aught that he has done.  
Oft have I marvelled Gunther yields him naught  
In tribute ; yet wouldst thou this topic shun

Didst thou once know what Siegfried's arm hath  
wrought  
For Gunther in old times—in this thou art  
untaught.”

## XXXIV.

Then waxed the strong queen's wrath ; her  
spinning, rent  
In fury, she cast down ; her nostril fine,  
Dilating, quivered ; all her breath was spent  
In thickly-coming gasps ; the lovely line  
That traced her bosom's curve moved like the  
Rhine,  
Storm-smitten ; thus, beneath an arch's spring,  
She stood erect with darkly flashing eyne,  
One white arm spread abroad, like opened wing  
For flight, and barbed her words with anger's  
fiercest sting.

## XXXV.

“Thou vassal's wife ! will nothing bate thy pride ?  
Deceived ? The word is thine. Before the face  
Of all the people let our cause be tried ;  
Then shalt thou see which takes the foremost  
place,  
Then shalt thou see and hide thy soul's disgrace  
In grief. The vassal's wife shall not precede  
The reigning queen. Oft have I grieved how base  
Thy lot is, lowly wed. Of royal seed  
Thou comest, but thy fall with meekness thou  
shouldst heed.”

## XXXVI.

Then Chriemhild's lovely lip the unlovely curve  
Of wrath took, when she heard the furious queen ;  
Deep in her breast she felt the giddy swerve  
Of passion, burning words of bitter spleen  
Arose ; but this she calmed, and spoke serene ;  
" So be it ! When the people throng to mass  
To-morrow at the minster, let the scene  
Be played. We twain upon the plot of grass  
Will meet, and she is first who first the gates shall  
pass."

## XXXVII.

Thus the first striving of the sister queens  
Arose and burst in fury not to die.  
Meanwhile the princely boys at play, to scenes  
Of women's wrath unused, stood troubled by  
And let the mimic targe and helmet lie ;  
The maidens stood with pallid lips, and fear  
Their breath caught, when along the vaulting  
high  
The angered queen's voice rang in echoes clear,  
Of meaning dimly guessed, yet boding evil near.

## XXXVIII.

Then Brunhild from the hall in anger swept,  
Her eyes scorn-flashing, and her ladies rose  
And followed ; but Chriemhild her station kept,  
Deep musing.—In the pane the still sun glows

Through liquid ruby stains, blood drops it throws  
Upon the folded lilies of her hands,—

Until at last she turned and changed her pose,  
Like one who breaks from some dread vision's  
bands,  
Or marks a foe close couched in far and friendless  
lands.

## XXXIX.

She stood beside a pillar, marble-still,  
The native glories of her gold hair crowned  
Her gentle beauty, and her young son, ill  
Dim-boding, with his arms her tall form wound ;  
A red stain lay upon the rush-strewn ground,  
Upon her robe's gold fringe, upon the chair,  
Rich-carven. Her the mother queen thus found,  
Queen Uta ; ere the thing was past repair,  
She sought to heal the strife with gentle words and  
fair.

## XL.

Then Chriemhild, hearkening, stroked the sunny  
hair  
Of her young son ;—so stood she there of old,  
When her great beauty was but promise fair,  
So stood she there and doubtful visions told,  
Unwitting all the glory that should fold  
Her future days ; and Uta, heavenly-wise,  
The truth saw, and the mystic dream unrolled  
Before the maiden's charmed and startled eyes,  
Then coming joys she saw in sweet and still surprise ;

## XLI.

Yet the vague words that Uta breathed of woe,  
Far-darkening, in her joy she heeded not ;  
So faint the images of sorrow show  
To eyes youth-dewy, so the central spot  
Of Hope by youthful bows is straightly shot ;—  
These, warning, Uta breathed again, that fear  
Might hold Chriemhild, by wrath her blissful lot  
To mar not. But her gentle soul was clear  
And still, as after noon's wild storm, a star-strewn  
mere.

## XLII.

For what of evil in the lady dwelt  
Lay hidden in the innermost recess  
Of her sweet soul, dark, silent, still unfelt ;  
Nor did Chriemhild that germ's existence guess,  
Or dream that some far day in bitterness  
It might awake ; not lightly did she brook  
Hard thought of others ; rather to caress  
Than curse her lips their lovely curving took ;  
Thus, pitying, Brunhild's wrath from memory she  
shook.

## XLIII.

So from her spotless plume a snowy swan,  
Unruffled, water-drops in gliding throws ;  
She deemed some thoughtless word of hers began  
Her sister's wrath ; thus, when at morn she rose

With soul renewed by still and soft repose,  
 Her orisons she said at dewy prime,  
 Unvexed by shade of wrath ; so flowers unclosed  
 In sunlight, so the lark his matin chime  
 Rings out in joy unreached by poet's sweetest rhyme.

## XLIV.

Then wended she with all her gracious train  
 Of high-born ladies solemnly to mass ;  
 Fair thoughts were hers and holy, not one vain  
 Or evil thing the portal pure might pass  
 Of her well-guarded soul ; as in a glass  
 Unshadowed she her inmost sins reviewed ;  
 Thus, full of thought, she reached the plot of grass  
 Before the minster, still by night bedewed,  
 And passed the waiting throngs with modest  
 grace endued.

## XLV.

The folk stood back to yield the gentle queen  
 Free passage ; then she raised her eyes awhile  
 And saw all fresh in morning's golden sheen  
 The lofty glories of the noble pile ;  
 Thence mighty angels bent, with tender smile  
 And yearning wings outspread ; there martyrs  
 calm  
 In high-poised niche rejoiced ; there from an isle  
 Of jewelled gold the Mother-Maid breathed balm,  
 There sweet-faced saints adored God's child with  
 folded palm.

## XLVI.

There prayer breathed through massive walls of  
stone,  
From fretted pinnacle that pierced the sky,  
From light-winged buttress, blossom-beaded zone  
Round clustered shafts, from tower embattled high ;  
Carved birds and squirrels, hidden daintily  
In leaf-entangled fruit, still prayer breathed ;  
There marbles pure of richly various dye,  
Deep-yawning arches, pillars flower-wreathed,  
Praised God in beauty—yet beneath men's passions  
seethed.

## XLVII.

And there before the solemn majesty  
Of that far-soaring pile of sculptured stone,  
In hearing of the deep-voiced harmony  
That flooded all the aisles with heaven-sweet tone,  
Now loud, now soft, like roar of billows blown  
Far over storm-swept downs, stood Brunhild, rich  
Of raiment, wrathful pale ; her dark eyes shone,  
Stern-purposed ; she was strung to resolute pitch,  
Nor marked she saintly looks above in carven niche.

## XLVIII.

But marked was she of all the hurrying crowd,  
As each one, passing, rev'ence loyal made  
Till Chriemhild came. Then cried Brunhild aloud,  
Advancing, that the train perforce was stayed

And the crowd stopped, as one to stop them bade,  
 To Chriemhild's face, Brunhild cried, "Stop ! before  
 The queen a vassal may not go !" Affrayed,  
 The ladies in each following trembled sore,  
 While Brunhild turned, and passed towards the  
 deep-arched door.

## XLIX.

Now Chriemhild paused, from holy musing torn  
 So roughly ; Chriemhild paused, erect and pale ;  
 Tumultuous throbs her heart shook, wrath, pride-  
 born,  
 Her deep eyes lit beneath her backward veil,  
 Wind-tossed ; quick breaths that boded coming  
 bale  
 Escaped her nostril fine and close-pressed lips ;  
 Transformed was she, as, in enchanter's tale  
 Some lovely lady, when her beauty slips  
 Away at soft-waved wand, by passion's dread  
 eclipse.

## L.

Oh, gentle lady, better never born  
 Wert thou than meeting thus thy crucial hour !  
 Where was thine angel guard, that summer morn,  
 That he not quenched this wrath with instant  
 power,  
 Nor snatched thee hence to dizzy-heighted tower  
 Before thy lips the fatal secret spoke ?  
 Far better wert thou faded ere thy flower,



Before this sudden anger from thee broke,  
The spark that hissing flame from smouldering  
embers woke.

## LI.

Was it Chriemhild that spake, Chriemhild, indeed,  
The gentle queen, unapt to wrath and scorn?  
Why swayed her body like wind-smitten reed,  
When sudden tempest o'er the lake is borne?  
What visioned beauty from her face was torn,  
What wild, fierce spirit in her sweet eyes burned?  
Ay me! had she from speech that fateful morn  
Her anger held! Far lighter backward turned  
Blown flames in ripened corn than woman's wrath  
well-earned.

## LII.

Her passion burst as music from a lyre,  
Impassive, rudely struck by skillless hand,  
In keen, cold speech that kindled deathless fire  
In Brunhild's soul, as flint and steel a brand  
With sharp swift strokes enflame until some land  
Is wasted. "Better hadst thou held thy peace,"  
She cried, and Brunhild, startled, turned to stand  
Before her, and the crowd with swift increase  
Of wonder saw the dawn of hate that could not  
cease.

## LIII.

"Far better hadst thou held thy peace to-day!"  
She cried, her breath with gusts of passion torn,  
"For, is Siegfried a vassal, yet obey  
Him must thou as thy master. He with scorn

Thy love unvalued and unasked hath borne ;  
 Then twice he overcame thee, thee he bound  
 For Gunther, when upon his marriage-morn  
 The humbled king in shame and grief he found—  
 I would thou hadst not stung my soul the thing  
 to sound

## LIV.

“ Before the world ! I would thou hadst not stirred  
 This passion in me ! Oh ! my friend, believe  
 Without my will escaped this bitter word,  
 The word thy madness asked. I grieve, I grieve,  
 That I have let the fatal secret leave  
 My guarded lips. Oh ! let us once again  
 Be kind, and do not thou, I pray, bereave  
 My heart of love ; but let us wash the stain  
 Of wrath with tears away from friendship’s hallowed  
 chain.”

## LV.

Thus the fair queen, repenting ere the close  
 Of that strong passion’s burst ; regretful tears  
 Dew-sparkles made upon the velvet rose  
 Of her pure cheek, and all her soul with fears  
 Was tossed. But Brunhild, like some sage who  
 hears  
 In trance the doom of nations, marble pale  
 And rigid stood ; it seemed a thousand spears  
 Her bosom smote ; then suddenly the veil  
 That dimmed past things her eyes left. Like a  
 gale

## LVI.

Her fury smote her—scorned, deceived, undone,  
As woman, queen, and warrior betrayed,  
And now, in sight of morning's clear-eyed sun,  
Her agony before her people laid !  
Her heart's best blood she willingly had paid  
To win one hour of charmèd strength again,  
One hour to be the glorious warrior maid,  
Who made great heroes bite the bloody plain  
And mowed thick ranks of war like autumn's red-  
ripe grain.

## LVII.

So struck to stone she stood ; the turning scale  
Of Chriemhild's poured-out wrath she heeded  
not,  
Like infant touches spent on coats of mail  
The gentle queen's soft words upon her hot  
And heavy senses fell. Then crimson shot  
Athwart her dusk-pale cheek, as pitying eyes  
Met hers, and suddenly the hateful spot  
She left, she knew not how ; but stifled cries  
Torn from her deep soul rose through holy  
symphonies.

## LVIII.

Thus the blest mysteries with unblest soul  
The sister-queens beheld ; with tears and sighs  
Chriemhild ; but Brunhild's deep and deadly dole  
Escaped not through her passion-blazing eyes ;

She heard the sweet, strong-chanted prayers rise  
 And float among the ribs of vaulted stone ;  
 She heard impatient, while fierce agonies  
 Her breast gnawed, while men's furtive glances  
     thrown  
 Towards her, made her soul, deep-wounded, inly  
     moan.

## LIX.

A century it seemed those pains of hell  
 Tore Brunhild, while she heard the chanted prayer ;  
 Then suddenly a doubt upon her fell  
 That Chriemhild's words were but the stormy air  
     Of woman's wrath, and thus she left despair ;  
 And when the mass was ended, at the door  
 She stood to face her foe, and bade her swear  
 Her words the bitter fruit of wrath that bore  
 Her over bounds of truth, harsh railing, nothing  
     more.

## LX.

Then Chriemhild, gnawed by grief and gentle  
     ruth  
 For the wan queen, a moment paused in doubt,  
 And mused if she upon that deadly truth  
 A veil should throw, and, while thus tossed about  
 With thoughts, she spoke not. Then the bitter  
     flout  
 Of Brunhild came again, "Speak, vassal's wife,"  
 She cried, "and pass, and let my people out,

Who wait behind thee." Like a keen-edged  
knife,  
Straight plunged in beating breast, the words  
stabbed ; thus the strife,

## LXI.

A moment stilled, burned fiercer. Then again  
Chriemhild the secret spoke, and Brunhild cried  
For proof ; and now so sorely burned the pain  
Within her, well-nigh swooned she at the side  
Of Chriemhild, ere the angered queen replied,  
"Thine own undoing askest thou. Behold !"  
And Brunhild looked, and saw, with down-crushed  
pride,  
Forthdrawn from Chriemhild's robe of silken fold,  
A ring she knew too well and zone of burnished  
gold.

## LXII.

"These Siegfried won from thee and, laughing,  
gave  
To me !" Then Brunhild spoke no word ; too  
deep  
The arrow smote ; but yearnings for a grave  
Fell on her and an everlasting sleep ;  
No more she sought her broken pride to keep,  
But turned and passed among the whispering  
throng ;  
Unheeding aught but pain, she swore to sweep

Siegfried from living men and brand her wrong  
Deep in his widow's soul with burnings fierce and  
strong.

## LXIII.

Now soon the city's myriad voices rose  
And buzzed the thing about, and soon the kings  
The story heard. The door to endless woes  
In this King Gunther saw ; he felt the stings  
Of conscience, and remorse his baleful wings  
About him flapped. And Siegfried heard with  
pain ;  
Straight to Chriemhild he went and heard what  
things  
Had passed. Then his first wrath and last the  
chain  
Of love between them wrenched with rough and  
angry strain.

## LXIV.

But much the lady wept and much she clung  
About him that his wrath soon passed away ;  
And he, forgiving, sighed that woman's tongue  
Such bitter coil should make ; he mourned the  
day  
That he to Chriemhild gave the golden prey.  
Then took they counsel how they might appease  
The kindled strife, Queen Brunhild's fury stay,  
And Gunther hearten, who the bitter lees  
Of shame and sorrow drank, with deep indignities.

## LXV.

Lightly to Gunther Siegfried fared and spake  
Soft, healing things and bade him mend his cheer,  
“Words are but words,” he said, “and do not  
break  
Men’s armour ; women’s strife we need not fear ;  
These ladies have forgot themselves ; a tear,  
A smile, and all is well with them again.  
My wife is full of grief that she so near  
The queen hath touched. To heal her sister’s pain  
She will do much ; more swift is she to bless  
than bane.”

## LXVI.

Then Gunther, “That my sister is to blame  
I think not ; Brunhild’s pride this evil coil  
Hath wound about us. No more love, but shame  
Shall I from Brunhild win. Methinks ’t is toil  
Mis-spent this Valkyr’s fury to assoyle ;  
Yet peace not war would I for mine and thine.”  
Then Siegfried in his breast the healing oil  
Of love poured, and, as one who drinks new wine,  
King Gunther’s soul revived, and he the fatal twine

## LXVII.

That wrapped them all about in snaky fold,  
With careful hand to disentangle sought ;  
In other forms he tried the tale to mould  
Of by-gone days, and what his brother wrought

For him he hid in subtleties of thought.  
This Brunhild sullen heard, all undeceived,  
Inly she gnawed her pain, but uttered nought  
Or good or bad to Gunther. He believed  
Her wrath at end; behind the veil he nought  
perceived.

## LVIII.

Then the fair sister-queens met once again  
And Chriemhild gave good words and Brunhild  
smiled ;  
So smiles the frosty moon, when bud and grain  
In May she blasts ; and Chriemhild, soon beguiled  
As guileless souls are, wept that she so mild  
And sweet was, after words so deadly keen ;  
And much she marvelled her own wrath so wild,  
So bridleless, with sweet Brunhild had been ;  
In all men's ears she blest the quick-forgiving queen.

## LXIX.

Thus there was hollow peace between the twain,  
And thus the kings the strife forgotten deemed ;  
That the spark even now the deadly train  
Of hate had fired, no soul about them dreamed,  
So fair and pleasant all things outward seemed  
In that sweet summer time, so gaily sped  
The lordly jousts, so rich a sunlight streamed  
On tower and town. Thus Siegfried ate his bread  
With joy, nor saw the sword that shook above his  
head.



LAY THE SIXTH  
THE LINDEN-LEAF



*PRELUDE*

**The Linden-tree**

O LINDEN-TREE, sweet linden-tree,  
All bathed in golden glow,  
With thy branches swaying pleasantly  
In the charmed air to and fro ;

Drowsily hums thy murmurous dome  
With myriad airy wings,  
Thy blossoms burst in golden foam  
The breeze to the sunbeam flings :

O linden-tree, how sweet to be  
Beneath thy branches laid,  
With thy soft song lulling quietly,  
In the cool and scented shade ;

All day to gaze at the tremulous maze  
Then slip to balmy sleep,  
When the fitting gleams of mystic dreams  
The senses spell-bound keep !

So burned of old thy leaves of gold  
Above the hunter's head,  
When he sought repose at the long day's close  
On the mossed earth's quiet bed.

So drooped thy scented bloom above  
The Minnesinger's song,  
Or the dance that sped with airy tread  
The summer evening long.

And once the stain of blood hath lain  
In thy still and sacred shade,  
When a hero died for a woman's pride,  
By a brother's hand betrayed.

What soul-bewildering fumes arise  
From thy censer, slowly swung  
By the priestly wind to evening skies,  
With vespers softly sung !

O linden fair, what magic rare  
Breathes down thy rustling shades !  
Thy leaves unfold dim tales of old ;  
I hear the clash of blades :

Before me pass, as in a glass,  
Those Teuton warriors old ;  
They rise and stand, as a living band,  
And not as a tale that's told.

*LAY THE SIXTH***The Linden-Leaf**

## I.

**N**OT long the fire-winged steeds had southward turned,

Nor yet their glowing path its steep incline  
Much shortened ; still the festal torches burned  
And still at Worms, in honour half divine,  
Abode the hero, whose renown will shine  
While German blood in German hearts shall beat,  
Siegfried. The first small spark had fired the line,  
Henceforth to blaze in fierce and deadly heat,  
Till in one furnaced woe all agonies should meet,

## II.

The Niblung woe. And yet the fatal strife,  
By pride enkindled, waged seven morns ago,  
By Chriemhild with her brother's haughty wife,  
And her wrath-wakened words, that laid so low  
Brunhilda's pride, for which ere long should flow  
Such tears and blood, lay dark in memory,  
Half-lost to her. And yet the kings of woe,  
Dark-gathering, dreamed not, nor the foam could see  
That tipped the up-gathered wave of imminent  
destiny.

## III.

As some fierce tigress of her cubs bereaved  
Rages, so Brunhild, to her bosom's core  
Stabbed by her shame made public, raged and  
grieved ;

Adown her lustrous cheeks, like molten ore,  
The hot tears poured ; her anguish was too sore ;  
Von Troneck Hagen watched those teardrops falling,  
(A man more loyal never weapon bore),  
He saw her grief, and on high Heaven calling,  
To his liege queen he swore a vengeance heart-  
appalling.

## IV.

This Hagen swore. And nights and morrows twain  
He brooded on it, held from any speech ;  
So broods red storm upon a breathless plain,  
So cling the vampire and the unsated leech ;  
Then straitly he King Gunther did beseech  
For vengeance on the man who wrought the woe  
To Brunhild. Thus was schemed the impious  
breach  
Of faith, and planned the fratricidal blow ;  
And thus the smouldering sparks of hate began  
to glow.

## V.

First, noise of war was made ; then came a change,  
And all were bidden to a five days' chase,  
Burgundians and Niblungs ; and the range  
From Worms was distant one day's journeying  
Space.

So Siegfried set himself with joyous face  
To go a hunting, and it was the eve  
Of their departure ; but with listless pace  
Chriemhild, as one who newly learns to grieve,  
Went, wrapt in boding fears she could not all  
believe ;

## VI.

For mystic dreams had thrilled her heart that night  
With portents, like to those in days gone by,  
Ere her slim body gained its princely height,  
Or the full soul within her fired her eye ;  
Now, as she walked upon the rampart high,  
Dim-boding, Hagen marked her, and he came  
To bid her farewell ; then with long-drawn sigh  
She turned, and met the warrior's glance of flame  
And told him all her dread, as with unchallenged  
claim

## VII.

Upon his aid. "To whom in this distress  
For counsel can I turn, but thee, O friend?  
Save thou my hero, and my soul shall bless  
Both thee and thine till time for me shall end."  
Then he his word most willingly doth lend :  
And she, "When Siegfried slew the dragon fell,  
The guard of Niblung gold, he did unbend  
His strained limbs in the brute's hot blood, and well  
He bathed, and all his body sheathed in wound-  
proof shell.

## VIII.

“ But while my Siegfried bathed, an envious wind  
Stirred the sweet linden-tree that gave him shade,  
And one light leaf came fluttering down behind  
The hero, and between his shoulders stayed,  
So that one spot was vulnerable made ;  
What woe if spear or sword should smite him  
there ! ”

Then Hagen : “ Noble queen, be undismayed :  
The Niblung’s life shall be my constant care,  
But mark this spot upon the vesture he shall wear.”

## IX.

Then dews of joy suffused the lady’s eyes,  
As, full of trust, she pressed the iron hand  
Of Hagen, and she thanked him ; passing wise  
She deemed the measure he so quickly planned ;  
For who such deadly guile might understand ?  
And while her lord slept in the silent night,  
Herself unloosed from slumber’s healing band,  
She rose, to sew a cross of colour bright  
Upon his garment laid to don with morning light.

## X.

How the fierce heart in Hagen’s bosom leapt  
When, on the morn he saw that fatal sign !  
A little backward to the kings he stepped,  
And whispered it with darkly glowing eyne ;  
But Gunther, like a reveller steeped in wine,



Shrank staggering, and his sister's farewell kiss  
    Burnt his blanched cheek and made his eye-balls  
        shine ;  
Then mused he on his hard-won bridal bliss,  
And Siegfried's generous aid and faith to him and  
    his.

## XI.

He mused on Brunhild's mien that fateful day  
    What time the martial maid with sword and spear  
Assailed him, and his soul shook with dismay,  
    Knowing the fierce, unequal combat near  
    With occult powers, mused how, with words of  
        cheer,  
Siegfried, in mystic robes of darkness veiled,  
    Came, and while Gunther fighting would appear,  
Over the war-maid's strength himself prevailed,  
And with the beauteous bride and treasure home-  
    wards sailed.

## XII.

Then mused he on the golden zone and ring,  
    Wrested by viewless hands in darkling fight.  
Alas, that Siegfried should have breathed the thing  
    To Chriemhild, and, alas, the fatal spite  
    Of women, that all this had brought to light !  
And then his cheek burnt hotter, as he thought  
    That all lay open to his people's sight,  
The binding and the shame Brunhilda wrought,  
The aid more shameful still that Siegfried's prowess  
    brought.

## XIII.

But after she, unknowing, for his death  
 Her lord had signed, Chriemhild in quiet lay,  
 Till slumber caught her softly-coming breath,  
 And a grim vision rent the veil away  
 From the dark future. Then in wild dismay  
 She screamed and woke, and in the dawning's chill  
 Knelt white and trembling, and that he would stay  
 From hunting, prayed her lord with passioned will,  
 And told him all her dream and dread of coming  
 ill.

## XIV.

Then Siegfried, sleep-dazed, in the dusky light,  
 With pitying love upon the fair queen gazed ;  
 Touched by her terror and the pure delight  
 Of beauty, in his arms he gently raised  
 And soothed, like some young child with pain  
 amazed,  
 The lady, gently chiding her weak fears ;  
 "In vain," he said, "the occult powers blazed  
 Upon me in my boyhood's far-off years ;  
 Why tremble now, when nought to hurt or harm  
 appears ?"

## XV.

So, ere the first dews sparkled in the sun,  
 Chriemhild with trembling touch her lord arrayed  
 For hunting ; spear, bow, quiver, one by one,  
 And lastly, Balmung, dread and mystic blade,

In flashing splendours in his baldric laid,  
Then her white arms about her husband flung  
And wept, her lofty stature on him stayed ;  
And with strange agony the lips that clung  
To his he kissed, nor knew what pain his bosom  
          wrung.

## XVI.

But Chriemhild knew that in that long last kiss,  
The bitterness of death lurked ; long gazed she  
Upon the godlike form that bore her bliss  
Away ; and thrice, with longing looks, to see  
Her face, he turned and paused, then, shaking free  
The golden reins, spurred onward in the light ;  
A kingly sun with vassal stars was he,  
Among those kings, of noble build and height ;  
His face was very strong, with thought and beauty  
          bright.

## XVII.

Strange fires were tangled in his golden hair,  
Wild lightnings slumbered in his clear blue eye ;  
Rich were his arms, his garb of fabric rare  
Blazed with the fatal cross in crimson dye.  
To gaze upon the hunters passing by  
The burghers thronged about the city old,  
And, seeing Siegfried, raised an awe-struck cry—  
“ Lo ! he that won the Niblung’s charmèd gold,  
And slew the dragon-guard and scaled the rocky  
          hold ! ”

## XVIII.

Then whispered they of Brunhild's ravished ring  
And girdle, and of service he had done,  
Unspeakable, to the Burgundian king,  
And secretly the Valkyr's beauty won.  
This Hagen heard ; and that he had begun  
He swore to finish ere that moon was high ;  
(So grew the darksome web the Norns had  
spun,)  
And Gunther heard ; and while his brother's eye  
Looked frankly to his own, moaned, shuddering,  
" He must die !"

## XIX.

Yet nothing of his purpose he let fall,  
But with the Niblung spoke in loving wise,  
As they rode on by tower and steep-rooféd hall  
And balcony, alight with ladies' eyes,  
By quaint-carved storeys, climbing to the skies,  
Dark-browed, and meeting like a woodland arch.  
Anon they lost the city's mingled cries,  
And trod the silence made by pine and larch,  
Then by the fortified Rhine they bent their  
peaceful march.

## XX.

By Siegfried's stirrup rode the younger kings,  
Gernot and Giselher, and they beguiled  
The passing hours upon their lingering wings,  
With song and jest and tale with wonder piled ;

Anigh them moved the people, weird and wild,  
Dark-faced and low of stature, from the land  
Of distant Nifheim ; dark amid the mild,  
Bright-haired Burgundians gloomed that shadowy  
band,  
Like troublous dreams that near the noon-day  
sleeper stand.

## XXI.

All day they journeyed, till at vesper-time  
They rested by the river's still expanse ;  
Afar they heard a convent faintly chime,  
They saw green shadows on the lit wave dance,  
And steep cliffs glowing in the sun's red glance ;  
Around their simple fare the hunters lay,  
And told of heroes tried by battle's chance,  
Of elves and shapes that shun the eye of day,  
Until the marshalled stars formed up in calm array.

## XXII.

Now when the wine leapt warmly in his veins,  
And earth lay steeped in solemn still repose,  
Siegfried, not boding treason, loosed the reins  
Of free, confiding mirth, and spoke with those  
Around him of past things ; of mutual foes  
And mutual friends, of far-off youthful days,  
When first they met in friendship's hallowed close,  
Of Chriemhild and her beauty's far-spread praise ;  
But Hagen noted all with fierce and hungry gaze.

## XXIII.

And, seeing Siegfried gay beyond his use,  
    Though he was never of a visage sad,  
And so much moved that bright, rejoicing dew  
    His vision dimmed at mention of the glad  
    Past times, and Chriemhild and the little lad,  
Their son, the fierce old warrior grimly mused  
    On the dark saying that the gods make mad  
The death-doomed ; then the royal brothers used  
Fair speech to Siegfried ; thus was friendship's  
    name abused.

## XXIV.

All peaceful sped the slumber-breathing night,  
    While squadroned stars wheeled by with noise-  
    less tread,  
And soon the pale east glimmered coldly white,  
    Then flushed in awful glory rosy red ;  
    Up leapt the sun, his new-dipped splendours shed  
On river, crag, and hill, and forest wide,  
    The fresh earth flung the shadows from her head,  
Her dewy face in fitful crimson dyed,  
And all things deeply drank of life's returning tide.

## XXV.

Then, one by one, beneath the firry spires  
    And oaken domes, small, feathered minstrels sing,  
Till a full chorus thrills the leafy choirs  
    And hill and dale with joyous music ring,

Then, in his measure, every living thing  
Swells the deep-hearted hymn of vital joy ;  
Hares gambol, squirrels frisk, on airy wing  
Bees hum, and painted flies with sunbeams toy ;  
And man, arising, fares abroad to his employ.

## XXVI.

Far down beneath its cliffs the river lay,  
Beneath its towered cliffs, the storied Rhine,  
And here it shunned the opening eye of day,  
And here, like sapphire, in the morning's shine  
It sparkled ; now the rocks, incarnadine,  
Transmute them silently to molten gold,  
And now the verdant slopes of blossomed vine  
Flush gold beneath the rude precipitous hold,  
Now the wide-beaming rays field, rock, and forest  
fold.

## XXVII.

Forth fared the hunters with the opening dawn,  
Their quick steps brushed the dew-beads glittering  
white ;  
They saw long sunrays smite the shimmering lawn,  
And golden lances pierce the forest night :  
In woodcraft, as in all the arts of fight,  
The kings excelled : before the welcome smoke  
Of breakfast fires upcurled, in many a flight  
Winged arrows from their humming bow-strings  
broke,  
And many a wild life bled in glades of beech and  
oak.

## XXVIII.

In his hot fury fell a tuskèd boar,  
Yet, dying, held both men and hounds at bay ;  
And Gunther he had silenced evermore,  
Him charging, where he could not break away  
For brush ; but Siegfried saw the king's dismay,  
And, leaping on the beast, with ready steel  
He slew him. Then, with darkened brow, a prey  
To anguish, Gunther turned upon his heel  
And mused on Siegfried's faith to him in woe and  
weal.

## XXIX.

But never swerved the fire of Hagen's gaze  
From the doomed hero ; with a ceaseless care  
He watched him secretly in all his ways,  
(So the keen hunter watches from his lair  
The lion, all unconscious of the snare),  
That he might smite him where the fatal cross  
Gave entrance to the weapon of the slayer :  
But the prince moved so swiftly, all to loss  
His pains turned, and in rage he trampled mire and  
moss,

## XXX.

Wrath-brooding. Little sport was his that day  
So strongly was the hunter's instinct bent  
On tracking to his death a nobler prey ;  
And evermore before his vision went  
The weeping face of Brunhild, and it lent  
New fury to the fire that in him glowed.  
So fared they till the sun's first heat was spent,



And the bright fire-maned coursers swiftly trode  
The blue to burning gold adown the westward road.

## XXXI.

Sun-spent and weary were the hunters then,  
And fain were they to rest and fain to drink ;  
But the great drouth had stilled in wood and glen  
The song of rills and made all rivers shrink,  
When Gunther suddenly a missing link  
Of memory captured, and he spoke of trees,  
Soft-glooming by a bubbling fountain's brink ;  
And Hagen saw them darkening in the breeze,  
And thither sped while still the princes lay at ease.

## XXXII.

Then Siegfried, all unconscious of his doom,  
Humoured the young kings in such boyish play  
As strong men love, a foot-race to the bloom  
Of limes, beneath whose shade the waters lay.  
So the three kings their weapons cast away  
For lightness, but the Dragon-slayer kept,  
With reckless ease of strength, his whole array,  
And over bending fern he glanced and swept  
And reached the spring, while far behind the tired  
kings stepped.

## XXXIII.

A living spring gushed in the dim, sweet shade,  
With cool, deep moss and drooping fern o'ergrown ;  
By day, by night, the escaping waters made  
A pleasant music on the rugged stone ;

Three sister-linden's arms, together thrown  
Athwart the bright wave, kept the sun aloof ;  
All day in soft and drowsy undertone  
Winged people murmured in the gold-green roof,  
And pale lights trembled through its closely-braided  
woof.

## XXXIV.

A moment bent the form of hero mould  
Above its image in the diamond well,  
Then eagerly within the water cold  
The Niblung plunged his hand, a hollow shell,  
And raised it full but drank not ; for it fell  
Upon him to await in knightly guise  
The coming of the kings ; thus, old books tell,  
Did the high breeding of those times advise ;  
So, thirsting still, he stood close watched by hostile  
eyes.

## XXXV.

Then, leisurely, as one who moves at ease  
In his own hall, unvexed by any care,  
He leant his goodly spear against the trees,  
Unclasped his tunic, made his hot brow bare,  
Breathing with joy the cool, spray-freshened air,  
Laid by all weapons, even the charmèd blade,  
The elf-forged Balmung, and defenceless there  
He stood, untroubled, in the linden shade,  
Nor dreamed his courteous deed with murder would  
be paid.

## XXXVI.

Him Hagen marked, and in his bloodshot eye  
The lurid flame of vengeance fiercer glowed.  
Then, hot and panting, full of jollity,  
The brothers came, and Gunther slowly strode  
Behind them ; as a tired man drops a load  
He dropped his body by the water's brink,  
And Siegfried, also bending, turned and showed  
The fatal cross, and scooped the cool, bright drink  
With curving palm ; then quick, before the stirred  
wave's wink,

## XXXVII.

Leapt Hagen panther-like upon the spear,  
Grasped it and kept it in his rough, right hand,  
And with the other caught the quiver near  
And bow, and even the Niblung's shining brand,  
The sacred Balmung, in its jewelled band,  
He seized and hurled in flashing wheels away ;  
And, ere the doomed man guessed the treason  
planned  
Or deemed himself in turn the hunter's prey,  
His own spear through the cross had made its fated  
way.

## XXXVIII.

Then, with a dread and far-resounding cry,  
Death-stricken, Siegfried sprang upon his feet,  
When, turning in his mortal agony,  
His eyes the flaming orbs of Hagen meet,

Intent to make the deadly deed complete ;  
 Transfixed by his own spear and paling fast,  
 The prince with aimless strokes the void air beat,  
 And all his deeds in one swift moment passed  
 Before his fading eyes, with blinding death-film  
 glassed.

## XXXIX.

But, ere he died, the loyal, generous soul  
 In one word, "Traitor!" from his wan lips burst ;  
 And suddenly he felt the darkness roll  
 Away from past things, and he saw the worst,  
 The treason that had plotted from the first  
 Against him. But he did not tamely die.  
 Vainly he sought his arms ; the hand accursed  
 Had moved them ; but he saw beside him lie  
 His shield, and smote with that the murderers  
 pressing nigh.

## XL.

Thus, bleeding from a brother's treacherous hand,  
 The princely stag the fierce hounds held at bay ;  
 They did not scorn to strike, that coward band,  
 To strike the stricken and defenceless prey ;  
 But only by the lime-leaf's fatal way  
 The prince was vulnerable ; so in vain  
 They sought the charm-bound Dragon-slayer to  
 slay ;  
 While he in noble fury smote amain  
 Till the woods rang and cleft was Hagen's casque  
 in twain,

## XLI.

And many a warrior fell, such deadly might  
Yet lived within the wounded hero's arm,  
Although the shadows of death's imminent night  
Had darkened all his being's fateful charm.  
At last he fell, but his great soul and warm  
Not easily might leave its palace fair,  
He fell, and nearer closed the murderous swarm ;  
His blood dyed all the wood-flowers blooming  
there,  
And Gunther's glances pale he sought with eyes of  
prayer.

## XLII.

Then, " O my brother ! " cried the dying man,  
With gasping breath and slowly-darkening eyes,  
While drops of anguish from his pale brow ran,  
" Speak once more brotherly before I die,  
And swear to me by all thou holdest high  
And holy to protect thy father's child,  
The desolate Chriemhild, lest my blood should cry  
To Heaven on thy knightly faith defiled,—  
Guest, brother, liegeman, friend, by treason foul  
beguiled.

## XLIII.

" I charge thee by the love of olden days  
My orphaned son and widowed wife defend ;  
If ever thou wouldst walk in pleasant ways,  
If ever thou wouldst call a good man friend ;

And Heaven to thee and thine for ever send  
All blessing ! For thy blood lives in their veins,  
To thee and Chriemhild did the same lives lend  
Their life. Speak out before my faint lamp wanes,  
Speak out, and cleanse thy soul from treason's  
shameful stains.

## XLIV.

“ Ay me ! my little lad, that men should say,  
That men should say of Chriemhild's princely son,  
' His own blood did his father's life betray,  
By brother's hands his father was undone.'  
But lest thy love to bitterness should run,  
Seeing in my son the features of his sire,  
And thou shouldst visit on this helpless one  
Dark memories his sweet eyes might inspire,  
Come near and clasp my hand and let thy wrath  
expire.

## XLV.

“ For ever blotted out be this dark day  
From thy remembrance ! Only think of me  
As of the brother of thy heart, thy stay  
When need was sorest, one who trusted thee  
To death, and, dying, turned to thee to see  
His best friend—yet the thing is very hard,  
To fall so meanly—and by treachery—  
Not as a warrior dies, face foremost, scarred  
By battle's burning joy, in sight of fame's award.

## XLVI.

“Alas my Chriemhild ! for her gentle sake  
I would my tide of life might turn again :  
Not death I fear ; the warrior must take  
Battle’s grim odds upon the bloody plain ;  
But to die thus, unshriven, with foul stain  
Of fresh-done trespass. Yet, thro’ my soul’s war  
A soft voice breathes, ‘Thou hast not lived in  
vain.’

And, spite of all my sin, perchance, afar,  
I may behold God’s light from some sweet-shining  
star.

## XLVII.

“For I repent me. Pray now for my soul,  
Fair brother, and let holy rites be done  
For this spent body, when the life-tides roll  
No more in it for ever ; do not shun  
My memory.” He ceased ; for now, out-spun  
Was his thin thread of life. And Gunther, bowed  
To earth by shame and sorrow, lay as one  
Death-stricken, and for anguish wept aloud,  
All wept, and none refrained but Hagen in that  
crowd.

## XLVIII.

Now Hagen had been wounded in the strife,  
Sore wounded, and his casque was cleft in twain,  
And when he pierced the prince, the unprisoned life  
Gushed out and sprinkled him with ruddy rain,

His own blood mingled with that shameful stain  
Upon his raiment : he, with passion torn,  
Flouted the dying hero ; “ Not again  
Through thee our queen shall sorrow ; but, forlorn  
And widowed, thy proud dame shall weep from  
night till morn.

## XLIX.

“ And none shall comfort her. And thy young whelp  
Shall howl beneath a stranger’s pitiless blow,  
And he shall cry, and cry in vain, for help,  
While thou with all thy strength art lying low ;  
I do rejoice me that I wrought thee woe.”  
Thus the betrayer with fierce flaming eyes,  
Staunching his blood that never ceased to flow ;  
But Gunther pardon craved with heart-wrung sighs,  
And all around him wept as when a father dies.

## L.

Then darkened all the sweet and sylvan scene,  
The green earth heaved the closing eyes before,  
And all things were as they had never been,  
While the last death-pangs Siegfried’s body tore ;  
But when his spirit passed, his lips once more,  
With Chriemhild’s name moved, and his strong  
heart broke,  
The stalwart limbs stretched stiffening in gore ;  
Like evening’s sunbeam, the last words he spoke  
Unearthly loveliness in his pale face awoke.



## LI.

Majestic, like a lofty god at rest,  
He lay upon his mossy woodland bed ;  
Some golden blossoms fluttered to his breast,  
And thick-leaved boughs encanopied his head ;  
But the cool, warbling wave was stained with red,  
Red was the balmy woodruff on the ground,  
On all his garments and his gear were spread  
Red blood-drops, and his lofty brow was bound  
With the dread damps and chills of death's  
unbreaking swound.

## LII.

But awe and shuddering seized the brothers twain,  
Gernot and Giseler ; bewildered sore,  
Scarce wist they how it chanced the guest was slain ;  
And who began and who the life-thread shore,  
They questioned ; and the Niblungs stood before  
Their dead, and asked what chance this sorrow  
wrought.

Then Gunther spoke of evil hap that bore  
Him deathwards. But the undreading Hagen raught  
Towards the spear and cried : "This vengeance  
to him brought,

## LIII.

"And this hand smote him, and not easily  
Will he arise to work us woe again.  
Who shall avenge him? Not the few we see,  
Faint-hearted Niblungs, who are in his train."

Then the young brothers : " There has fallen a  
stain  
Upon us that no blood can wash away,  
Not though the heavens should break in goryrain,  
And quenched in blood were the great eye of day,  
And one day our doomed race in blood this deed  
will pay."

## LIV.

And then they raised upon a shield of gold  
The lifeless form and bore it silently,  
On cross-laid spears in Siegfried's banner rolled,  
Beneath the changing arch of sky and tree ;  
The Niblungs, Burgunds, and the brothers three  
In silence followed ; but who wrought the woe,  
Von Troneck Hagen, laughed in bitter glee ;  
And when the evening star had fallen low  
And every household fire in Worms long ceased to  
glow,

## LV.

They reached the city and so stilly passed,  
That no man of their home-returning deemed.  
Then the dead warrior, with face aghast  
And wan, without the house where Chriemhild  
dreamed,  
They laid and left. The pale, pure starlight  
beamed  
Sadly, and waned in mist ; the watchful cock  
Gave warning ere the first white dawning gleamed,

What time day's cares at sleep-barred spirits knock,  
And, at Aurora's touch, morn's pearly gates unlock.

## LVI.

Then the deep minster bells began to chime  
For mass, and to the holy house of prayer  
Went Lady Chriemhild in the dawning time,  
And men before her flaming torches bare,  
When, on the pavement in the ruddy glare,  
They caught the glitter of a shield of gold,  
And through dense mist the warrior lying there,  
Scarce saw they, ere a sudden shrill cry told  
Their lady saw and knew that form's heroic mould.

## LVII.

Ah ! who may paint the deadly agony  
Of Chriemhild, when she clasped the silent dead,  
Kissed the sealed eyes that never more would see,  
Cradled upon her breast the helpless head,  
Washed with hot tears the stains of dull dark red,  
And, for warm kisses, felt the icy chill  
Of lips whence love and life were ever fled,  
Of pulses, once so strong, for ever still,  
Till in a death-like swoon she lost all sense of ill ?

## LVIII.

Even the rough linksmen stood aside in awe,  
Heart-stricken by the lady's utter woe,  
And when her swoon of agony they saw,  
Some tears from one man's eyes began to flow,

The other groaned and turned his torch, that so  
It might not fall upon the piteous scene ;

Then from the hall ran serving-folk to know  
What that dread cry in the dim dawn should mean,  
With Sigmund, Siegfried's sire, and his bereavèd  
queen.

## LIX.

Now, at the mother's heart-struck cry, the life  
Came pulsing through the widow's breast again,  
Back, like the cutting of a keen-edged knife,  
Flashed the full consciousness of bitter pain,  
And Chriemhild rose, and looked upon the slain,  
Her wide eyes all amazed with agony ;  
She marked him weaponless, and tracked the  
stain

Of life-blood to the silken cross, that she  
Herself had sewn, in trust of Hagen's loyalty.

## LX.

Then all the lovely lustre of her eyes  
Was altered, and the deathless fire of hate  
Changed all her features and her gentle guise  
Of speech, and marred the sweet and tender state  
Of womanhood upon her, till the great,  
Fierce tide of anguish burst, and thus she spake :  
“ Thy spirit passed not through the glorious gate  
Of battle, nor did foe thine armour break  
With sword cuts ; but thy death crept on thee like  
a snake,

## LXI.

“In treachery from behind.” Then Siegfried’s sire  
This hearing, bent, hand-shadowed, in the light  
That flickered red in gusts of smoke and fire.  
He saw, and knew that she had read aright  
The dreadful riddle of that tragic sight;  
And Siegfried’s mother wept that she had borne  
A son so noble for so sad a plight;  
And Chriemhild stood of joy for ever lorn,  
And with a gust of rain awoke the wan-eyed morn.

## LXII.

Then, with the pale day, all the city came  
With lamentation wild, and awe-struck woe,  
And many armed them to avenge the shame  
Of the strong Dragon-slayer, lying low  
In blood; but no man wist who dealt the blow.  
And Sigmund would have taken arms, despite  
His weight of years, to smite the unknown foe,  
But Chriemhild clung to him; her lips were white,  
She held him with the terror of her glances bright.

## LXIII.

“Not yet awhile, not yet awhile,” she cried,  
“The fated hour of vengeance is not yet!”  
So he stood awed and musing, at her side,  
Noting her rigid face and eyes unwet;

Then they took up the murdered prince and set  
With reverence upon a seemly bed,

In a fit room, where priest and warrior met  
To pray and watch in turn beside the dead,  
And tapers through the gloom a spectral radiance  
shed.

## LXIV.

Where, like the work of some great sculptor's hand,  
In pure, cold marble, and exceeding fair,  
But terrible, so that men gazing, stand  
And cross themselves with murmured, hasty prayer,  
Knelt Chriemhild in the wan and waxen glare,  
With all the azure brilliance of her eyes  
Concentred in the mute face, unaware  
Of aught, while men filed by to recognize,  
Before it sank to dust, the hero's mortal guise.

## LXV.

But Chriemhild waited, speechless all the day,  
Unmoving, till the night wrought thicker gloom,  
Till the tall tapers shed a purer ray,  
And Gunther paced with Brunhild thro' the room,  
While music wailed the hero's timeless doom ;  
Then Chriemhild rose, while bitter, burning scorn  
Blazed in her eyes and scorched her beauty's  
bloom,  
Crying, "Go, murderer ! feign not to mourn,  
Nor vaunt unblushing here thy kingly faith forsworn" !

## LXVI.

Then Gunther turned, shame-smitten. But his queen  
Exulting, mocked the desolate woman's woe,  
And cried, "Ha, ha! Was Balmung's edge so keen?  
And sped the shaft so truly from the bow?  
Struck in the back, too, turned to flee his foe!"  
But Chriemhild spoke no word and made no sign,  
Only her eyes burnt into Brunhild's so  
The Valkyr quailed and went; then in the shine  
Of tapers Chriemhild watched the slayer to divine.

## LXVII.

And when the second morning fired the east,  
Paling the tapers in the chamber drear,  
Where the wan Chriemhild's watch had never  
ceased,  
Von Troneck Hagen came to Siegfried's bier;  
And suddenly, when the slayer's step drew near,  
The icy blood in crimson witness burst  
From Siegfried's heart, transfixed with his own  
spear.

Then Chriemhild rose, with wild eyes all athirst  
For vengeance, and in thrilling voice the traitor  
cursed.

## LXVIII.

Within the vaulted minster, where began  
The fatal strife for which such blood should flow,  
They laid the body of the kingly man;  
Then the three brother-sovereigns strove to show,

By fit observances and pomp of woe,  
Sorrow and honour for a brother slain ;  
Long ranks of mailed warriors followed slow  
To mournful dirges in the funeral train,  
And all the city folk with mourning filled the fane.

## LXIX.

There in the minster's still and solemn gloom,  
With blazonry and storied panels dight,  
In carven marbles fair, a splendid tomb  
Was planned for him. But ere the grave's long  
night  
Shrouded the dreadless hero from her sight  
Chriemhild unveiled the well-known, well-loved face,  
So awful in its frozen beauty's light,  
Kissed the cold lips and clasped the body's grace,  
Then stood alone and vowed the death of all her  
race.

## LXX.

Now when the tomb closed over Siegfried's form,  
A strong, swift shudder shook the hearts of men,  
Above the city lowered in gathering storm  
A black, low muttering thunder-cloud, and then  
Thick mist rolled up on winds that swept a fen  
Till all the city sheeted stood in gloom,  
Where wild shapes moved and shrieked and  
shrieked again ;  
Then pallor sat on cheeks of richest bloom  
And every soul the shadow felt of imminent doom.







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